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THE YOUNG LIFE-SAVER SET HIS TEETH AND ADVANCED DANGEROUSLY FAR.

OR,
THE STORM-WAIF of GIANT'S BOOT.

BY JO PIERCE,
AUTHOR OF "FIVE POINTS PHIL," "BOB O'
THE BOWERY," "HARLEM JACK,"
"JEFF FLICKER," ETC.

CHAPTER I.
DRIFTING TO DOOM.
"THE vessel is doomed!"
"Can't we save her?"
"There ain't no earthly chance."
"I'll go out in a boat, if you will."
"Don't think of it, Rob. Nobody can't say
that old Foretop Ben is a coward, an' he's seen
life at sea hisself, an' knows sailors' perils an'
needs; but ter put out in a boat now would be
rank suicide. A dozen men couldn't launch a

boat, an' we're only two. See them breakers come in!"

The speaker pointed as he spoke, and the fire which burned just before him revealed a wild and thrilling scene.

First of all it showed a rocky coast, half-ledge and half-cliff, with ragged and erratic rocks everywhere. Against this bulwark of stone the water was breaking with great violence, for a furious storm was raging; and the wind drove the ocean waves in toward the land in swirling mountains of foam.

And, revealed by the frequent flashes of lightning, a helpless ship was seen drifting steadily toward the pitiless breakers.

It was a man and a boy who had discussed the chances of rescue. They stood alone on the rocks, and were liable to continue alone until the vessel struck. After that they might have live men for company, but were more likely to be visited by dead men, if at all.

At that point the coast put out a miniature cape. At low tide it was like a boot in shape, the toe joining it to the main-land; but at high tide the water flooded the toe, and the remainder became an island.

Further along the coast, on the main-land, was a town, but angry waves rolled between it and the point of rocks, at that juncture.

On the cape—the Giant's Boot, it was called—lived three persons who followed the calling of fishermen. They were, respectively, a man of fifty years, who was known as Foretop Ben; a young man called Tony Bristles; and a boy named Robert Wiley, but more commonly known as Sky-Rocket Rob.

Tony Bristles had gone to the town for help, but no one had yet appeared. Foretop Ben looked in that direction anxiously.

"No sign o' them yet," he observed. "You might fire off a few more rockets, Rob."

The boy hastened away, while the weather-beaten fisherman slapped his arms around his burly form, looked out over the frothing water and shook his grizzled head.

"Can't see how anything kin save them from goin' ter pieces on the rocks. A boat won't live out thar, even ef it kin be launched, an' I reckon the Giant's Boot will be their grave!"

An unusually long, lingering period of lightning, like a succession of flashes, followed, and he could see the vessel plainly. She was struggling in a hopeless, helpless way in the grasp of the water. Much of her rigging had been torn away, and it was to be doubted if she could have made sail even in calm weather.

Already she was but little better than a wreck, and when she went upon the rocks of the Giant's Boot the desolation would be completed.

The fisherman turned his face toward the west just in time to see a rocket ascend from the further side of his water-locked kingdom. It was the work of Rob Wiley, and was a signal to the people of the town which had been established upon the boy's own suggestion.

From that fact he had received his sobriquet—Sky-Rocket Rob.

"Ef they come," Ben muttered, "they'll find it hard ter cross from the mainland. The waters run riot over the Neck."

Realizing his inability to render the vessel any service, he walked to the west side of the Giant's Boot. He had barely arrived when he saw that the town'speople had not been idle; a boat was tossing on the troubled water, and heading for the point. Even then the oarsmen had to struggle vigorously, and as the little craft pitched and dipped it was not hard to see how helpless she would be off the coast proper, where the wind had full sweep and the waves ran far higher.

But Foretop Ben saw more than this.

"A woman, by thunder!"

He uttered the words in wonder as he caught sight of fluttering drapery in the boat. Who the wearer could be he was not able to surmise. There were brave women along the coast, but who was there that could see a call to face the storm and exposure of this occasion?

Rob Wiley, too, had seen the craft, and he joined the fisherman. They speculated in vain as to the woman's identity until the boat was almost at hand, and then Rob exclaimed:

"It's Mrs. Vincent-Brown!"

"Who's she?"

"A New York lady, who is now stopping at the hotel in our town."

"Zounds! she's got pluck. Is she so anxious ter do good that she's come through this storm?"

"I don't know," Rob returned, doubtfully. "From what I've seen of her I supposed she was too selfish to have a thought for any one but herself. Her husband's name is Brown, but she

calls herself Mrs. Vincent-Brown. She's aristocratic!"

"Hum!"

It was little more than a grunt from the old fisherman, but it expressed a good deal. He wasted no good will on such persons as the New York lady seemed to represent.

The new-comers reached land, but, in the effort to touch it in the usual way they scored a failure, and the boat and all its occupants made a disastrous landing. The boat was overturned, and the human beings spilled out unceremoniously.

The lady did not prove agile, and it was not until Roger Walden, a well-known young man of the town, gave his aid, that she regained her feet. She came up smiling, however.

"Ain't this jolly!" she exclaimed.

Nobody spoke to confirm her view of the case, but she was not abashed.

"So far, good!" she added. "Now, send along your wreck, and we will bind up the wounds of the castaways and take an inventory of stray jewels."

"Would you rob the dead, woman?"

It was a sharp question from Foretop Ben, but she showed neither anger nor shame.

"I expect to find the rocks lined with jewels, after the crash," she serenely explained.

"When the lives of our feller-bein's are on the precipice o' eternity, it ain't no time ter think of plunder—unless that's what you're here fur."

The old fisherman was angry. Long years of life on the ocean had made his every sympathy ready to go out to "Jack," and, having been wrecked himself, he knew how awful was such a crisis in the affairs of man. His eyes revealed the fierce resentment which Mrs. Vincent-Brown had aroused, but she remained unmoved outwardly. Her answer had its sting, however, though it was not of a kind to be felt by Ben.

"I don't have to get my living from the ocean," she retorted.

"This is no time for idle talk," interrupted Roger Walden, curtly. "Let us see what can be done."

"I'll go out in the boat if you will!" cried Sky-Rocket Rob, eagerly.

"How can a boat live outside the point?" asked one of the party. "You've seen how we were capsized just in crossing the Neck, and that is a flea-bite to the mountains that roll out-side."

"If I were a man I'd go out!" affirmed Mrs. Vincent-Brown, gayly. "It would be just jolly!"

Glances were bent upon her that were far from friendly. With many she was no favorite. She was of a nature aptly described by the term "rattle-pated;" she was a woman with fixed opinions, usually wrong and always radical, which she never hesitated to avow; but, above all, the men were all sailors in a degree, and her levity when a vessel, freighted with human beings, was driving upon the rocks, was obnoxious to them.

Almost in silence they walked to the extreme side of the Giant's Boot. As before, the doomed vessel was to be seen, but Ben was startled to see how fast she was moving to her doom.

The exact time of reprieve could not be surmised, but the end was certain. Where the craft would receive her death-blow was not so sure. Between her and the Giant's Boot were many irregularly-situated jagged rocks. She might become impaled upon one of these, or might escape them only to drift on and meet her fate on the point itself.

The watchers stood in a group, with Roger Walden, Foretop Ben and Rob Wiley in front, and discussed the situation. The fierce wind which swept in from the ocean almost took Mrs. Vincent-Brown's breath away, and as nearly caused her to repent that her hare-brained desire had made her one of the party.

For the time being she was silent.

Not so the men. Deeply did they regret their own impotence, and even the fact that widows and orphans had before then been made in their town by just such attempts, they talked of the chances open to a boat in the boiling flood.

Luckily for them, the verdict was that it would be madness to put out; no boat could live there, and they knew it.

Arriving at this conclusion, nothing remained except to watch the vessel go to pieces.

The end approached. The craft drew nearer, plunging in the grasp of the water, leaping like a frightened steed as it approached its doom, and as helpless as a feather in the gale.

The impulse was strong in the minds of the watchers to turn aside that they might not see the tragedy, but some sort of fascination held

them to their places. Watch they must and did while the doom was fulfilled.

All knew when the fatal shock came. They saw the vessel rise on the crest of a foaming wave, while, in the gulf before her, a rock, shaped like the horn of an anvil, became strangely and ominously distinct. One moment the vessel hovered over the place of destruction, as though recoiling from her doom, and then the mighty force which was making a plaything of her, hurled her forward upon the rock.

There was a crash which was heard even on shore, and then old Foretop Ben shivered like one beset with cold.

"She never'll get off that spike until she's torn ter bits!" he uttered, gloomily.

"Our work begins now," shouted Walden. "No one can live on her deck, and we shall soon see human beings coming—alive or dead."

"Scatter along the rocks," added Ben; "we must be ready to pull in any unfortinit who may come ter our grasp. Providence grant that they may come alive!"

It was an earnest wish, but he knew very well how strong the chances were against. Still, they were men eager to do their best, and they took their positions and eagerly watched each sea that rolled landward from the doomed vessel.

CHAPTER II.

THE DIAMOND NECKLACE.

SKY-ROCKET ROB was as eager to help as any one there. Although only sixteen years old, and small of frame, he had a brave nature, and all his life had been passed in fishing and boating along the New Jersey Coast. Known unto him were secrets of the deep which many men never acquire, and familiar acquaintances were the waves that broke on the coast in calm and storm.

He took his station near the water, and waited with the others.

Ten minutes of inactivity passed, and then he uttered a cry.

"A man!—a man!" he shouted, pointing to the boiling breakers.

"Where?" shouted old Ben, in return.

"Above you. There he is again!"

All saw the unfortunate then, as the waves flung him up where the fire on the land cast a light that tipped a frothing roller with red, and there was a contraction of the line with the purpose of saving the unknown.

Rob saw that he could be of no use, and he kept his place and continued to watch. Suddenly he saw a sight which electrified him. How he had missed seeing it before he did not know. Only a few yards away the garments of a woman became visible, a black area on a background of foam; and he realized that she would be the first of all to touch land.

Whether she still lived he did not know, nor did he have time to call for help; the crisis would come before any of his allies could reach him.

He braced himself for a great effort.

Buffeting its prey about, the ocean gathered her helpless form for a last effort and flung her toward the rocks.

The young Life-Saver set his teeth and advanced dangerously far. An older head would have seen great probability that he would be carried back with the wave; he thought only of the woman.

Then she was flung toward him like a projectile from the watery battery; he closed his arms around her, and both were dashed to the ground.

He fell with great force, so close to the rocks that his shoulder touched them, and then the water closed over him.

He realized his danger and grasped for support.

His hand providentially closed upon a point of rock.

Another moment and the water was receding, sucking at him with a force which bade fair to render his grasp futile, but he clung with unnatural strength and conquered the foe.

Once more left free, he arose, holding to his burden, and staggered back out of danger's way.

Not far did he go. He bore a burden heavy for his young arms, and the recent struggle had told upon his strength. He was obliged to let the rescued woman fall, but he did so by dropping upon his own knees, thus lowering her gently to the ground.

The light of the fire fell full upon him and the woman he had saved. She was unconscious, and would have fallen entirely had he not held her head on his arm. He saw that she was

young and pretty, and as her damp, unloosened hair fell over his arm, it was like a great veil.

Rob felt his own inability to deal with the case properly, and as he glanced around and saw that all the men were busy, he called to Mrs. Vincent-Brown. She came with steps noticeably slow for one ordinarily so headstrong.

"Do you see this?" cried the boy.

"I see," answered Mrs. Vincent-Brown, coldly.

"She came from the wreck."

"Yes."

"What can we do for her?"

"Haven't you done enough?"

"Enough! I've only begun. Can't we revive her, somehow?"

"Oh! she'll come out of it!" retorted the woman, indifferently.

"What are you here for," cried Rob, "if not to help the unfortunates?"

"I choose those I work for."

The Life-Saver regarded her in silent amazement.

"I have none too good an opinion of that woman," added Mrs. Vincent-Brown, severely.

"What do you know about her?"

"I have eyes!" was the wise reply. "Others may be stupid, but I profess to be able to tell the character of another woman as soon as I see her. If she is unworthy, I have a subtle presentiment of it. Call it instinct, if you will."

"I call it rank nonsense!" declared Rob.

"No impertinence, boy!"

"When my tongue gets as lawless as yours, I'll try to curb it."

The Life-Saver was filled with indignation. He was built upon a broader plan than the lady from New York, and even if he had known that one of the sufferers of the wreck was a criminal of the worst type, he would have given hearty aid in that hour, believing that one of the foremost duties of life is to help another in time of distress.

However good Mrs. Vincent-Brown's judgment may have been, her eyes were as keen as those of all her sex usually are, and she suddenly moved forward, reached toward the rescued girl's neck, and lifted an ornament that encircled it.

It was a necklace of diamonds!

The firelight caught the jewels, and out flashed a hundred little gleams of light such as only the pure gems can give. The little gleams made Rob Wiley wink rapidly. He had not seen the necklace before.

"A costly trinket for one to wear with such clothes!" proclaimed the austere discoverer.

The Life-Saver was but a poor judge of female apparel, but, in this case, he did see that the garments referred to were of the plainest material and simplest style.

"Moreover," added the critic, "you will see that, instead of being worn in the usual way, the necklace is made longer by means of a cord, so that it was big enough to slip down out of sight on her neck. I should not have seen it had it not been disarranged. Why should she wear the necklace like that?"

"Because she wanted to, I presume!" retorted Rob, feeling that his reply was justified by Mrs. Vincent-Brown's own language.

"You are impudent!"

"Then don't you be so unfeeling!"

Further conversation was interrupted by the approach of the men. They had made one rescue, and only one; the man first seen had been dragged out of the boiling waves.

He was not insensible, but he leaned heavily upon Roger Walden's arm as he approached.

"Keep up your watch," he was urging to Roger.

"That shall certainly be done, though I doubt if more will be saved. Whoever else is in the water is making slow progress, and the longer the journey the more danger of death upon the rocks by the way."

"There were a dozen on the vessel."

"Heaven help them; we cannot."

The stranger looked at the scene before them.

"It's a bad place for a boat, I admit."

"The worst on the coast. I know every point, I may almost say, from Cape May to Sandy Hook, and there isn't a place where the ocean buffets more fiercely in a gale. Jagged rocks are all along, and it's a very caldron of wrath at such a time. A boat can't live there."

Sky-Rocket Rob and his party had not yet been seen. The fire blazed between them and Walden, with black smoke rising freely from the high pile of fuel. Now, however, Roger directed the rescued man to sit down while he went for a supply of whisky which old Ben had brought with excellent foresight and placed in a safe niche.

As he turned around the fire, the young man saw Rob and his companions and paused in surprise.

"What! another saved?" he cried.

"Yes, yes!" Rob responded; "but she's insensible. What can we do? There is whisky by yonder rock—is it safe to give it to her?"

For answer Roger hurried to the niche. His sympathies were aroused afresh, and in a stronger degree than before. He returned with a well-filled bottle.

"Did you save her, Rob?" he asked.

"Yes."

"You've done yourself proud."

"It's a rare treasure, no doubt!"

There was a sneer in Mrs. Vincent-Brown's voice as she made this comment, and Walden paused and looked up at her gravely.

"Don't you think so?" he inquired.

"I want it proved before I believe it."

"At least, she is a woman."

"Some persons are a disgrace to the name."

"I've known such!" retorted Rob, pointedly.

Roger did not make further comment, but proceeded to pour some of the liquor between the rescued girl's teeth. He showed a care and sympathy in doing so that brought a sneer to Mrs. Vincent-Brown's face. That woman was not by any means all evil, but she was selfish and uncharitable, especially in dealing with her own sex.

It was very evident that what the unknown woman needed was the care of another woman, and when Roger had given her the whisky, he, with doubt and anger in his mind, was about to address certain emphatic words to her when the man who had been snatched from the ocean made his appearance on the lower side of the fire.

The sound of voices had brought him, and he may have had some important thing to say, but it fled from his mind at sight of the girl.

He stopped short and looked at her in surprise.

"So she is saved!" he muttered.

"Did you know her?" Walden asked, eagerly.

"She was on our vessel."

"Who is she?"

"Her name is Carona Dane."

"Had she friends there?"

"She was alone."

"What do you know about her?"

"Nothing to her credit!"

The rescued man spoke harshly, and Mrs. Vincent-Brown's face lighted up with triumph.

"I told you so!" she declared.

"What do you mean?" asked Walden, ignoring the last speaker. "But why do I ask? This is no time for idle gossip. This girl has claims upon us, as every woman would have, which we cannot be deaf to."

"Bless me! I believe the man is smitten!"

The new retort caused Walden to turn an angry glance upon Mrs. Vincent-Brown. She had come down from New York on her vacation, and had amused herself by seeking his company much, and trying to get up a desperate flirtation. She had been wholly unsuccessful, but friends of his had been glad to receive her money for a few weeks, while she was their boarder; and he had never quarreled with her, though despising her severe remarks and selfishness.

"The woman was practically a prisoner on the vessel," added her late fellow-voyager, "and would have been turned over to the authorities on arrival at New York."

"Why?" asked Mrs. Vincent-Brown.

"For theft!"

Rob Wiley turned a wondering gaze upon the motionless face of the girl he had saved.

"I don't believe it!" he declared.

It was the impulsive retort of an honest heart, but there seemed to be a good deal of foundation for the opinion. The face did not appear that of one given over to crime or misdemeanors; it was innocent looking in all respects. Rob felt that he ought to be the champion of her whom he had saved, and was resolved to be so.

A frown was on Roger Walden's face, but he did not waste any more words. He looked to where Foretop Ben and the other men were still watching to do good.

"We must adjourn to the shanty," he observed. "Rob, will you give our intentions to your old friend, tell him to use his judgment here, and join us when he thinks proper?"

The Life-Saver hastened away.

"Will you two go to old Ben's shanty?" Roger added.

"Anywhere," the rescued man returned, "to be out of this fierce wind."

"And how about helping me carry this insensible girl?"

"I'll do it, surely. I want to keep watch of her, you see."

CHAPTER III.

THE WAIF OF THE WRECK.

THIS speech brought another unfriendly glance from Walden upon the speaker. There was something ominous and sinister about it, Roger thought, but it was no time to argue the matter. If the girl was being slandered, she was unconscious of the fact.

The young fisherman turned to Mrs. Vincent-Brown slowly.

"Can you be persuaded to give your aid after we reach the shanty?" he asked. "The girl needs care."

"Not being selfish, I am always ready to give my assistance," the self-appointed model of propriety responded. "You can rely upon me."

Sudden as was her change of expression, her voice was not such as to awaken doubts of her sincerity. Something else would have done so if Roger had been enough at leisure to watch her closely.

Ever since the unknown's assertion that Carona Dane was a thief, Mrs. Vincent-Brown had been looking curiously at the necklace, and then at the other survivor of the wreck. All things went to indicate an inquisitive turn of mind as deep as it was discreditable.

Rob returned, and Carona was lifted and carried toward the shanty.

On the way the stranger explained that his name was Wesley Carter; that the doomed vessel had been the Singing Sally, bound from Norfolk to New York. Although a medium of trade she had accommodations for half a dozen passengers, and he and Carona Dane had been among those who had started on what was undoubtedly the schooner's last voyage.

Even then he displayed a willingness to say more about the girl, and in no complimentary vein, but Walden did not encourage him; and the wind not only made conversation difficult, but interfered with locomotion.

In due time the shanty was reached.

When Foretop Ben retired from active sea life, and ceased to be a sailor, he went over on the Giant's Boot and built a home such as his taste craved. His taste and the home were alike simple.

Seen at this later time, the latter was a one-storied structure of extremely weather-beaten aspect. The boards which composed it had never been painted, smoothed, or laid in much order, and it would not have satisfied a finical person.

Entering, it was seen that comfort was not lacking. There were two rooms, with a stove in each, and, meager as was the furnishing, the shanty was quaint, cheerful and inviting.

Roger had been a frequent visitor at the place for years, and he did not hesitate to make himself at home.

Carona was carried to the inner room and placed upon the bed. The leader then fixed a steady gaze upon Mrs. Vincent-Brown.

"As I have before said," he began, quietly, "our rescued friend needs a woman's care. You will observe that she shows signs of returning consciousness, so I will leave it to you to say whether her wet apparel shall be removed before or after she comes to. In yonder corner you will find feminine garments. They were once the property of other wrecked women, but are now Ben's by possession. They are at this girl's disposal. Are you disposed to take charge?"

It was not a very gracious question either as to words or manner of utterance, but Mrs. Vincent-Brown knew very well that she could not trifle with Walden.

While she remained on the coast his good will was valuable, and though she would rather have acted disdainfully, she was shrewd enough to be complacent.

Besides, she was curious as to the waif of the wreck, and something might happen to her good if she was left alone with her.

"Go along!" she retorted, airily. "What does a man know about such matters? It is purely a woman's affair, and I am able to manage it. Get away, all of you, and I'll let you know when you are wanted."

"Omit no precaution in her behalf."

"Bless me! what next? Be off!"

Mrs. Vincent-Brown had brains, if not conscience, and she could be gracious when she tried. Knowing her as he did, and well aware that she was not capable of feeling deep sympathy for any one, Roger was reassured in a

measure, but it was not without some doubts that he retired and closed the door.

Sky-Rocket Rob and Wesley Carter stood in front of the fire, drying their wet garments.

Carter did not appeal to Roger's admiration as he stood thus clearly revealed. He was a tall man, broad across the shoulders, but otherwise slender and bony. His complexion was dark, and a mustache of unusual length swept over a prominent chin.

"This fire feels good; I'm chilled to the marrow!" he declared.

"You'll find dry garments yonder."

"I'll put them on at once. Boy, why didn't you mention them?"

"Roger's boss here."

Rob answered ungraciously; he had no good words to waste on Wesley Carter. Why had the man been so quick to brand Carona a thief? Even while she lay senseless he had instilled poison into the minds of those who were strangers to her. Rob hated him for it.

"Well, I'm thankful to have my life left," Carter added, as he made for the dry clothes.

"How came your vessel in such a plight?" asked Walden.

"I'm no sailor, and can only say that the gale caught us on the hip. One of the masts broke short off and went down with a wreck of the rigging. By the time it was cut away the schooner was leaking and unmanageable—I suppose she would have been in such a wind, anyhow. We drove on to the coast as helplessly as you can conceive."

"Did you leave the craft of your own free will?"

"Hardly. The Singing Sally had leaked badly, and, when we were impaled on a spike-like rock, it became all-day with us. All hands had to take to the deck as a last resort, and from there I was washed away."

"And your companions?"

"I can't say. Some were left when I was washed off, but how many I don't know."

Roger asked other questions, but not one in regard to Carona Dane. She was uppermost in his mind, and he listened eagerly for sounds from the inner room. He suspected Carter of having a desire to injure the rescued girl, and would have shown the man the door cheerfully if he had consulted his choice.

The young fisherman had grown restless when the door to the other room opened and Mrs. Vincent-Brown appeared.

She closed the door behind her and approached Roger.

"The girl is conscious and strong of body," she announced.

"That's good."

"I am not so sure as to her mind."

"No?"

"I am perplexed, and want your advice—or rather, I want you to take charge of the case. It's too deep for me. Come in!"

Her manner was mysterious, and Roger would have questioned her gladly, but she abruptly receded, opened the door again, revealing Carona Dane; and he had no choice but to go to her at once.

She sat in a chair by the fire, but as the garments supplied for her were both neat and of fair fit, if not costly, her naturally pretty face lost nothing by the scene. Roger found it an attractive face. She was of a style of beauty somewhat delicate, and her expression appeared sad. Her eyes, as she looked at him, had the doubtful expression of a troubled child, rather than a woman's gratitude, such as might be expected then.

He smiled reassuringly.

"I am glad to see you so well," he remarked.

"You are very kind," she returned, in a low, hesitating way.

"I hope you have escaped without injury?"

"I think I have."

"You are now among friends who will do their utmost for you."

"I am very thankful."

"Can you suggest anything for our guidance?"

"No; nothing."

She answered with a pause between the words, and, withal, a peculiar air which Roger could not fully understand.

"Had you friends on the Singing Sally?" he continued.

"No."

"You were going to New York, I suppose."

"Yes—I suppose so."

"Have you friends there?"

"I don't know."

"No?" returned Roger, in surprise. "Well, you came from Norfolk. Your relatives live there, doubtless."

"I don't know where they do live!"

This singular statement was made with a voice which trembled, and in such a manner that the questioner half-expected her to burst into tears. There was a vagueness and uncertainty in her way that led him to credit Mrs. Vincent-Brown's statement that she could not understand the girl fully, but he attributed it to the peril, hardship and horror of the wreck.

Her sadness appealed strongly to him.

"We are humble folks on this coast," he resumed, "and not overburdened with money, but I trust that our hearts are all right. We shall be glad to send you to your relatives, or summon them here."

"I am grateful to you," Carona answered, "but I don't know how to help you. I have lost my past life; if I had not learned it by chance, I should not even know my own name!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE MYSTERY IN HER LIFE.

ROGER WALDEN looked in amazement at the waif of the wreck.

"Not know your own name?" he echoed, mechanically.

"Let me explain," the girl responded, with feverish haste, a red spot appearing in her cheeks. "I am deep in misfortune, and, though I would avoid the revelation if it were not a necessity, I feel constrained to make an explanation to you."

"Your confidence shall be respected," Roger returned, with grave kindness.

He looked uneasily at his companions. Rob Wiley was thoroughly reliable, but there was a good deal of doubt as to Mrs. Vincent-Brown and Wesley Carter. That the latter was Carona's personal enemy Roger had at first thought, but she gave no indication of so regarding him.

To send these two persons out while the rescued girl was talking would be to arouse their ill-will.

He decided to make no radical move.

"A few days ago," began Carona, "I found myself in Norfolk just recovering from severe illness. For two weeks I had lain delirious with fever. When I recovered, my past was gone. I did not know who I was, whence I had come, or why I was there."

"I questioned my nurses, but could get no light. I had come to their door ill and feverish, footsore and dust-laden, and begged for a night's shelter. My words were rambling and vague, and gave them no clue; they asked me questions, but did not even learn my name."

"Plainly, I had been too much afflicted to realize my situation, or what was wanted."

"As a result, when I did recover, I could not get information from them, and as my mind would not work, I did not know a thing concerning my past life."

"The gradual return of bodily strength did not improve me otherwise, and when at last I was what might be called wholly well, I was at loss as much as ever."

"In place of memory I had a conviction: I felt, without knowing why, that it was a vital necessity for me to get to New York City at once. I listened to this voice of fate or chance—whichever it was—and engaged passage on the vessel."

"When I did so I was requested to register. I took the pen, and, without thought or difficulty, wrote the name, 'Carona Dane!'"

"When I had done this I regarded it with wonder. Was it my own? Certainly, I had written it as easily as a person in good health would put down his own—in a purely mechanical way. I felt that I had penned my own name, but was not sure of it."

"It awakened no recollections."

"Well, the vessel sailed with me as a passenger, and"—here she paused and looked at Wesley Carter, with a world of doubt and fear in the gaze—"my story may be concluded by saying that I was shipwrecked in the storm."

Carter and Mrs. Vincent-Brown exchanged glances. Both smiled—she, openly; he, behind a hand which strayed to his mouth in his half-hearted attempt at concealment.

Not so with Roger Walden. He had seen less of the world than the two cynics, and, consequently, was more ready to believe. He did believe Carona. She had told the story with simple pathos and an air of veracity and sorrow which went straight to his heart.

"You are to be pitied," he declared, earnestly.

"Heaven help me!" she murmured.

"More than pity—I and my friends shall be glad to work for you practically."

"I thank you; I thank you."

"Have you any plans?"

"If I had, the wreck has driven them from my mind."

"You might advertise. The influence of a newspaper is all-powerful. If exerted for good, it can do great good."

"The idea is worthy of consideration."

"If your name is really Carona Dane, as appears likely, a news-item should bring some information of your friends. But, for now, rest and quiet are things which you need above all others; so we will leave you to yourself for the remainder of the night."

"You are very kind, indeed," she answered, tears glistening in her eyes.

"We are simple people here, and long life on the border of the restless ocean has given us a keen feeling of sympathy for all who have suffered from that same ocean. Rest easy, and rely upon us as your friends. Good night!"

"Good-night—and may Heaven bless you!"

Roger had been moving toward the connecting-doors, but the straightforward sympathy of his voice and manner went straight to the girl's heart, and her reply was more pathetic than words could indicate.

The young fisherman closed the door and faced his former companions.

"I can no longer endure inaction," he added.

"Foretop Ben and the other men are enough to do all that man can do on the shore, 'tis true, but I want to be with them. I may be able to wrest one more life from the sea-destroyer's grasp. Rob, this dwelling is your home, and, in the absence of Ben, you are naturally master. Of course you will have charge."

This was a quiet suggestion that he, not Mrs. Vincent-Brown or Carter, would have Carona Dane in charge, and all understood it.

The man and woman did not resent it in words. Sky-Rocket Rob nodded with quiet emphasis.

"I'll attend to all," he responded.

Once more Roger went out to meet the storm, and the boy Life-Saver prepared to act as host.

"You'll find a chair yonder, ma'am," he said to Mrs. Vincent-Brown, "and there are stools for you and me, sir. Make yourselves comfortable."

"I'm all right," Carter declared. "It takes more than a gale or a shipwreck to bother me."

"I believe you needed some one to pull you out?"

"Haven't I returned thanks?"

"I presume so."

"All heroics may be saved for the girl with the remarkably history!" he sneered.

"The improbable history!" affirmed Mrs. Vincent-Brown, elevating her nose.

"You don't believe it?" questioned Rob.

"I don't!"

"Nor I!" Carter agreed.

"That's the best proof that it's true."

"See here, youngster, don't be impudent!" commanded Carter, sharply.

"If you sit on a teeter-board you can't expect to bob up without going down now and then. I've as good right to criticise you as you have to be so merciless to her!"

Rob pointed toward the inner room, and his eyes flashed indignantly.

"You believe in her, I judge."

"Yes."

"I don't," deposed Mrs. Vincent-Brown.

"Charity is not an ingredient of your nature."

"See here, if you don't hush up, I'll box your ears!" cried the lady, furiously.

"Allow me to do it now," volunteered Carter.

"Try it, and you lose the shelter of this house to-night—not to mention some damage I may do while you're boxing!" was the Life-Saver's defiant retort.

Carter wisely concluded to laugh and abandon his purpose.

"You've sailed with the girl," continued Mrs. Vincent-Brown, in whose nature malice was a passion rarely at rest, "and ought to know her well."

"I know she was accused of theft during the voyage."

"What did she steal?"

"Money. The captain had some in his cabin, and it strangely disappeared. It was found—strangely or otherwise, as you will—in Carona Dane's state-room."

"Put there by some one who hated her, perhaps!" flashed Rob.

"You should be a detective!"

"I may turn to one."

"With your intuition, you would be a phenomenal success."

"Perhaps you'll admit that fact proven, later," Rob answered, pointedly.

"This scene is disgraceful," Mrs. Vincent

Brown asserted. "Walden is rude, but he would not uphold remarks like yours."

"Then don't flood the air with venomous words," stoutly returned the Life-Saver. "In yonder room lies a girl whose life has been in the greatest peril. She has been through enough to awaken the pity of any one whose heart is not of stone. Here, on the coast, we natives don't put on a world of style as the Upper Ten of New York do. We dress plainly, instead of in silk and broadcloth; we eat plain food, instead of fancy dishes cooked by shallow-pated Frenchmen for city swells; our churches are for worship, instead of for show. And we sympathize for the unfortunate and afflicted, instead of dragging them into the mire and setting our heels on their necks!"

Rob Wiley was not a boisterous lad, and his manner was as subdued as his voice was low; but this long speech was delivered with indignant warmth, which was a warning to the others.

Even Mrs. Vincent-Brown saw the need of keeping her worst impulses down.

She and Carter were dependent on the humble fishermen for hospitality, and their campaign against Carona must be discontinued for the time.

Mrs. Vincent-Brown, however, never forgot the reproof she had received, and she silently vowed vengeance upon the bold and honest boy.

CHAPTER V.

SUSPICIOUS FACTS.

HALF an hour later another discovery was made by the watchers along the shore. All their diligence had failed to show them another person struggling in the furious water, and they decided that no more were likely to be found alive.

The waves were breaking in regular succession over the deck of the Singing Sally, and it seemed that if any one remained there, lashed in place or otherwise, death by drowning must have occurred.

The general opinion, based on previous experience, was that all had been washed off and had perished on the jagged rocks that lined the space between the wreck and the shore.

Pitiless as was the wind, and drenched as they were by the driving rain, the hardy fishermen did not intend to quit their post for some time yet. They kept up a regular patrolling of the shore, and one trip finally bore fruit.

Foretop Ben raised a shout, and Roger Walden hastened to his side to find that another man was discovered. Sitting down in the midst of the storm, an old man was leaning his back against a rock and enduring his troubles the best he could.

He was well below the locality where any one was expected to be washed ashore, and had thus been left for a considerable time uncared for, while he had not discovered their fire on account of intervening rocks.

He was fully conscious, and able to talk, but not to move about. His knee had been injured severely, and he could neither walk nor creep away from where he was found.

At the very first he, having but little hope of surviving the night, had told Ben that he was a survivor of the Singing Sally; that his name was Horace Addison, and that he lived in Philadelphia.

Ben soon succeeded in putting him in a mood more cheerful, so that he thought less of arrangements for dying than of those for living; and, when Roger arrived, they proceeded to lift and carry him toward the shanty.

This caused a good deal of pain to his knee, but he bore it well.

In due time the shanty was reached, and they surprised the previous occupants by their entrance. Wesley Carter's face lighted up at once at sight of the old man.

"What! is it you, Addison?" he cried.

"Ha! so you still live, Carter," the newcomer returned. "Well, I'm glad there's one other survivor."

"We count three, all told."

"You seem none the worse for your close call."

"I'm not."

"I'm about as near a wreck as the Singing Sally is, but I've seen too much of nautical life to take it to heart. What makes me sorry is to know that the captain, the crew and the other passengers are gone."

He spoke with feeling, but Carter's voice was indifferent as he made answer:

"That's so."

"Providence hath us all in its keeping, however, and I suppose there's wisdom in the summons home when it comes."

"I don't want it too soon."

"You say we count three, saved. Who is the other?"

"The Dane girl."

"Poor child!"

"Oh! I reckon she wasn't born to be drowned. They say those born to be hanged, never can be done for t'other way."

"Carter, you are criminally severe!"

"Call it what you will; I stick to the opinion I gave on the schooner. The captain was not a severe man, but he believed that she stole his money. As for that, it was learned here that the girl had a necklace of diamonds around her neck, and put on in such a style, with such an attempt at secrecy, as to suggest that it, too, was stolen. Perhaps it belonged to Mrs. Dwyer, who had the forward cabin."

"A diamond necklace, say you?" replied Mr. Addison, with sudden interest.

"Yes."

"Where is it?"

"In the other room."

"I'd like to see that necklace."

"I'll retire there while you jump into dry clothes, and get it," volunteered Mrs. Vincent-Brown.

"Wait!" directed Roger. "Why do you speak of this article, Addison?"

"I think it may be mine."

"Why?"

"Because I've lost such a thing."

"Lost it how?"

"I had the necklace in my state-room, and, as it was a keepsake of untold value, I cared for it diligently until, during a crisis of the storm, thinking we were going down, I ran out of my state-room and left it on my berth. It was a false alarm, but, when I returned, the necklace was gone; and the most careful search failed to reveal it. Now, its actual value was about ten thousand dollars, but, to me, it was worth more than all the money in the world."

"Describe this necklace!"

"It was of diamonds, curiously strung. The body, as it may be expressed, of the necklace was of gold beads strung together just far enough apart so that one diamond could be introduced between each two gold beads. Attached to the chain thus formed was a shield of gold with an inscription, 'W. to L.,' made on a groundwork of imitation leaves."

Reluctant to admit anything against Carona Dane, Roger had demanded the description before he would allow the jewels to be produced, but the result was most disheartening to those who hoped to prove Carona innocent.

Addison had given an accurate description.

"Bring the necklace!" the fisherman directed, addressing Mrs. Vincent-Brown.

The latter was not reluctant to obey. As she had already announced, she was a woman of "intuition." When she first saw a person she made an estimate of his, or her, nature, and from that moment was doggedly bent on following the aforesaid first impression.

Her opinion of Carona was not favorable, and she hailed any chance which would prove the girl as bad as she had proclaimed her to be.

She entered the inner room.

Carona had fallen into peaceful sleep, and there was little danger in removing the necklace. Roger's last order had been given when there was a good deal else on his mind, and he had not paused to think that the waif of the wreck was wearing the diamonds.

If he had done so, he would have insisted upon waiting until a more seasonable time.

The lady from New York had no scruples, and she proceeded to unclasp the chain. Carona moved slightly, raised her hand to her neck and murmured a word.

"Mother!" she whispered.

Mrs. Vincent-Brown had a mother whom she professed to love, and did, perhaps, to the extent of her dwarfed nature. The fact should have touched her heart, but it did not. Working steadily, she secured the coveted article without arousing Carona, and then returned to the other room and reclosed the connecting door.

She held up the necklace, and in the light it glittered with a brightness which seemed to Roger to be of fiendish origin.

"It is mine!" Addison exclaimed.

Mrs. Vincent-Brown danced it about with her fingers until it shot out a volley of gleams which appeared as baleful as the sparkle of a serpent's eye.

"A bonny trinket!" she observed.

"It is a woman's necklace," said Walden, rallying. "Pray, Mr. Addison, how does it happen that you carry such a thing about?"

"It was my sister's!"

There was quiet pathos in his voice, and Roger could not doubt him or his desire for justice.

Few men had he ever seen who were as noble of appearance as Horace Addison. His hair and beard, touched by age until they were almost snow-white, framed in a lofty forehead and earnest, kindly eyes. Honor was the man's birthright and lasting possession, or all signs went for nothing.

"For many years," the speaker added, "yonder necklace has been the companion of my wanderings. It binds me to the memory of my lost sister, and I hope that, when I join her in the grave, it may be buried with me."

Roger's expression grew more and more gloomy.

"Mr. Addison," he made answer, "can you account for it being in Miss Dane's possession?"

"Indeed, I cannot."

Mrs. Vincent-Brown and Carter smiled sarcastically.

"As I said," continued Addison, "I left it on my berth when I left the state-room for a short time. When I returned, it was gone."

"Who had access to your state-room?"

"As I left the door open, any one might have entered at that time. There was danger of the Singing Sally going down at once, and, in the panic, a level-headed thief—that is, a person who kept cool—could have entered my room and seized the diamonds."

"When we brought the Dane girl here," calmly deposed Mrs. Vincent-Brown, "the necklace was around her neck, but it had been made larger—although originally large enough—by splicing it out. Why was this done, unless to enable it to slip down on her shoulders so as to be invisible?"

It was an argument not easily met, and Roger's brows were contracted in a frown, but Sky Rocket Rob warmly answered:

"Do you suppose any one would think of stealing when the vessel seemed just going down?"

"We need not argue the point," interrupted Wesley Carter, with a disagreeable smile. "Theories and sentiment all grow weak in the presence of the fact that she *did* secure the necklace. The only question is, did she steal it?"

CHAPTER VI.

AN OBJECT OF CONTENTION

"I FIND it hard to believe ill of that girl!" declared Mr. Addison. "She has a most attractive face, and my opinion of her has been favorable from the first."

"It does you credit, sir!" warmly answered Roger Walden.

"Perhaps you can explain how she got the necklace," added Carter.

"At present I can't, nor is it necessary that I should. You and I, sir," continued Walden, his voice rising indignantly as he went on, "need not concern ourselves about it. The diamonds belong to neither me nor you; it is none of our business what becomes of them. Neither is it for us to act as her judge or jury. Let Mr. Addison manage the affair."

"Your advice is so good that you will do well to keep it in mind, instead of trying to bulldoze those who venture a word contrary to your views," sneered Carter. "Arrange it to suit yourselves; I don't care a picayune."

Turning aside he went to a corner of the room and sat down.

There was a good deal of ill-will in the party, and all on account of a girl who had spoken in the case, thus far, almost with the voice of silence. Strangely saved from the storm, she had come among them and, by her mere individuality, had created a strong drama. She had made warm defenders and venomous enemies, and those of the party who had been old friends to a certain extent were now arrayed against each other.

Addison had taken the necklace and was examining it in a mechanical way, his mind being on other subjects. His fine old face bore a troubled expression, but this finally gave place to a look of relief.

"Madam," he said, addressing Mrs. Vincent-Brown, "will you kindly return this ornament to Miss Dane's neck?"

"What?"

The lady from New York looked supremely astonished.

"I have my reasons," he added, "and absolve you from all responsibility. Will you return it?"

"Certainly."

It was an ungracious assent, but the lady knew which way the wind was blowing, as it were. Whatever might be her judgment as to human nature, she was discerning in certain respects; and she plainly saw that Horace Addison was one of a high rank in life.

Such a man the wily lady could not afford to affront deliberately.

She returned to the inner room, and succeeded in returning the necklace to Carona's neck without awakening her.

Roger had a vague theory as to the plan that was in the old gentleman's mind, and respected him all the more.

Foretop Ben and some of the other fishermen came in, reporting that no new discoveries had been made, and Roger announced that he would take a turn along the line of the breakers. Rob hastened to add that he would go, also, and they went forth together after Walden had privately cautioned Ben not to leave until his return.

"What do you think of it?" Rob asked, eagerly, as they once more faced the wind.

"Of what?"

"The girl."

"There is a mystery to this diamond affair which I can't understand. In fact, all that refers to her is mysterious."

"I don't think ill of her, though."

"Nor I."

Roger made the statement with emphasis, but it expressed only a part of what was in his mind. Carona affected him peculiarly; he was strangely drawn toward her, and inclined to feel for her in her misfortunes. If the weight of testimony was against her, and it was hard to explain it away, he could not believe that she was a thief.

"We must help her, Roger," Rob pursued.

"We will."

"But what can we do?"

"There's the rub!"

"She didn't steal those diamonds."

"Then how came she by them?"

"That's what I'm going to find out. Addison ain't a hard man, and he'll give us a show. Then I'll go ahead and find out the facts."

Walden did not reply. He appreciated Rob's hearty good will, but was equally alive to the difficulties of proving what they wished. The scene of the alleged robbery was the schooner, and that bade fair to go to pieces before the storm abated; probably only three persons had been saved, and these were the alleged thief, the man who had been robbed, and a man who hated the alleged thief.

The groundwork for a detective case was not good.

By that time Roger and Rob had reached the water's edge, and they proceeded to view the scene critically. The rain had decreased somewhat, and the wind, as a consequence, was less difficult to face; but the ocean had abated no part of its fury. High, foam-capped billows were chasing each other constantly toward land, and they fell upon the Giant's Boot with a force which filled the air with boom after boom.

Out on the deadly rock upon which she had been impaled, the Singing Sally was yet to be seen, her sole remaining mast rising above the water, which almost constantly broke over her deck.

"She won't stand it long," shouted Rob.

"That she won't. There's a tremendous force at work, and she will go to pieces right there, unless she manages to wrench herself clear of the rock. The wonder is that she holds, anyhow; but I presume that there is another rock at bow or stern, from which she gets some support."

"This going to sea is a serious business, Roger."

"You are right, my boy; let that life alone. Better be a humble fisherman on this coast. True, the men in our town who are engaged in other pursuits think we sometimes take great risks, but it isn't like cutting loose from all but a frail vessel. The sea is a merciless master."

For an hour the two friends paced the shore. No bodies were cast up, and the only change to be seen was in the schooner.

Her deck and her mast appeared to be getting lower and lower, and the only explanation was that she was being steadily wrenched apart.

Later, Roger and Rob returned to the shanty. They found Addison and Carter asleep on the floor, while Foretop Ben smoked a black pipe and warmed his back at the fire with an air of great satisfaction.

Mrs. Vincent-Brown had retired to the inner room.

As no more could be done then, the remainder of the men lay down, and all were soon asleep. They rested well until daybreak and past.

Morning found a fairer scene on the Giant's Boot. The sun was out in undiminished glory, and the sky was of the brightest blue. But the ocean was not so easy to appease. Its surface

was still rough and foamy, and the incoming waves broke angrily on the beach.

Of the Singing Sally but little remained. The last of the masts had gone, and the only thing which rose above the hulk was the remnant of that mast which had succumbed first to the gale. The dismantled craft was a sorry-looking thing.

The time had come at last when a boat could be handled, and the fishermen launched one and went to the wreck. No sign was seen of a human being, alive or dead, and but little could be told as to the exact condition of the schooner until the ocean eased off a little more; but it was clear that she had leaked at many points and taken in about all the water she could.

A more hopeless condition could not be imagined.

Half an hour later all were astir at the shanty. Horace Addison found himself much better off than he had anticipated. There had been ground to fear that his knee was permanently injured, but he could now step upon the corresponding foot without much pain. He would have to limp awhile, however.

Both he and Wesley Carter were generally lame and sore, but they had come out of the adventure wonderfully well, all things considered.

Foretop Ben found great responsibility resting upon him as cook for so many, but it was no new work, and he prepared a breakfast as palatable as it was limited in variety.

Mrs. Vincent-Brown was late in making her appearance, but, when she did come, she reported Carona evidently nearly well again. She was sent to ask the girl out, and the latter soon appeared.

She had a shrinking, half-frightened air, but was not oblivious to her duty. She was quick to recognize Roger and Rob, and hastened to thank them again for what they had done the night before. To Carter she gave only the coldest bow, but, catching sight of Horace Addison, she advanced with an expression of great pleasure upon her face.

"Oh! Mr. Addison, are you, too, spared?" she cried, with more of lightness of spirit than she had manifested at any time before.

"My life has been spared, child," he responded, gravely and gently.

"I am very glad."

Mrs. Vincent-Brown and Carter exchanged looks and smiled sneeringly.

"We have come out of the storm through many perils," Addison added.

"Yes," Carona sighed.

"But, I hope, with clear consciences."

"Our peril and our escape should show us how dependent we are upon Providence, and how powerful it can be in our behalf."

Addison's manner encouraged Roger in the belief that he would deal gently with the girl, and there was great relief in the idea; but the conversation was interrupted by Foretop Ben's call to breakfast.

All sat down, but a shadow was over many there. It was known that, after the meal was finished, Carona's case must be disposed of in some way.

CHAPTER VII.

INNOCENT OR GUILTY?

WHEN all had satisfied their hunger, and the breakfast-party broke up, Addison spoke privately to Walden.

"Will you take Mrs. Brown to walk? I want to speak with Miss Dane, and want no witnesses except friends. I will not speak before the Brown woman and Carter. Can you free me of their presence?"

"I can, and will."

Roger caught eagerly at the little device, and then went to Foretop Ben. The result was that, soon after, Ben took Carter by the arm and led him away, and Rogers himself asked Mrs. Vincent-Brown to go to walk—both making an excuse of going to see the wreck from the shore.

Their captives objected, but old Ben promptly asserted his rights, as owner of the shanty, and informed them that its interior was not at their disposal for the time being.

Both Carter and the lady from New York suspected that it was a scheme to keep them from seeing the settlement of Carona's case, but they were helpless.

When remonstrances failed they went sulkily. Carona, Addison and Sky-Rocket Rob were left as the sole occupants of the shanty.

The old gentleman had decided upon his course. He hoped that the interview would end to Carona's advantage, and that she would establish her innocence, but, in any case, he had

decided not to prosecute her if she would give up the diamonds.

Rob was anxious to hear the conversation, but this he could do anywhere in the room, and he took pains to keep at a distance, and devoted his attention to repairing a fishing-net.

Addison began in a roundabout way, but finally approached the subject he had at heart.

"It is sad," he remarked, "to think of so many of our fellow-voyagers gone to another world."

"It is, indeed."

"As for us who remain, we are not fixed as well as could be wished. If anything is recovered from the wreck, it will be nearly or quite ruined."

"Yes."

"I hope you lost no valuables?"

"My loss was not heavy. I had my money with me, and that was about all I had, at all."

"I lost a valuable diamond necklace."

Both Addison and Rob looked at Carona eagerly, but she gave no evidence of guilt.

"That was bad," she observed.

"It was a complete line of those jewels, with smaller, almost—invisible gold beads between which served to keep the diamonds in place, but were scarcely visible at a distance. Besides this a gold ornament was attached, marked with the inscription 'W. to L.' upon a device of imitation leaves."

The old gentleman looked keenly at Carona, but she gave no evidence of ever having seen the necklace.

"Perhaps you will find it inside the schooner, yet," she suggested.

"Do you think so?"

"There seems to be a hope, I should say."

"My theory is that some one picked it up. In fact, I think it came ashore."

"Then you ought to find it."

"Possibly I shall. Quite likely, it is being worn on somebody's neck, now."

Carona looked puzzled.

"You and I, and Wesley Carter, were the only ones saved," she slowly, doubtfully returned.

"Yes."

"Then who could be wearing it?"

"That is just what I wish to learn. Can you give me any suggestion?"

Patient, charitable and forgiving as Horace Addison was, his voice was beginning to grow a trifle stern. He was giving the girl a chance to refer to the jewels she wore upon her neck even then—though they were invisible—but she did not explain or confess. This suggested the belief, even to a charitable mind, that she was guilty, and was trying to brave it out, and his faith began to fail.

"I can't give you any help," she answered, "but"—here a sudden terror flashed into her eyes and dismay became imprinted on her face—"surely you don't suspect me?"

"Why should I suspect you?"

"It seems by your words to lie between Mr. Carter and me, and I do not forget the unjust accusations against me on board the Singing Sally. I was accused of taking the captain's money—which I declare I never did."

"And you don't know where my necklace is?"

"No, sir."

"Miss Dane," sternly retorted the old gentleman, "it is on your neck now!"

"On my neck?"

"Yes."

"Oh! Mr. Addison, you wrong me—you wrong me!"

"It was there a few hours ago; I believe it is there now!"

Pitifully pale was the girl's face, and her air of distress grew deeper, but she flung her hands up to her throat and fumbled there feverishly.

"You shall see!" she cried; "I will prove my innocence. I wear a necklace, but it is one of the plainest kind, without even one diamond; and not worth ten dollars to any one—"

She had pulled at the necklace, which she could not see, and pulled so roughly that it was unclasped prematurely; and, when she found it loosened, she suddenly held it out to vindicate her cause.

But her sudden pause in speech was that of alarm, for, as she extended her hand, she and both her companions saw a string of gleaming, costly diamonds, any one of which was worth five times the avowed total value of the necklace.

Addison gave only one glance at the jewels; then he fixed his gaze upon Carona's face. Was she the most consummate of actresses, or the victim of a strange deception? If her expression was a true copy of what was in her mind she was dumfounded and terrified.

She gazed at the diamonds in speechless dismay.

"Just Heaven!" she said, in a whisper, "what does this mean?"

Not a word answered Horace Addison, but he looked as keenly as ever.

She said no more. Her frightened gaze continued to dwell upon the jewels for several moments; then the hand which held them sunk down and Carona turned her gaze upon the old gentleman.

Her face was whiter than ever.

"Who put this upon my neck?" she asked.

"Isn't it yours?" he asked.

"No."

"Then how could it get there?"

"I don't know."

"Where is your own?"

Her hand sought her neck.

"Gone!" she returned.

"And you don't know how my jewels came into your possession?"

"No."

There was a brief silence. Addison and Rob Wiley felt that to believe in her further was to do violence to common sense. Carona had been the first to drift ashore, and the necklace had been around her neck when she was brought to the shanty. True, as Rob well knew, Wesley Carter had aided to bring her, but his position had been such that he could not have made any change of necklaces, even if so disposed.

No one could have made the change after the girl was washed ashore. She must, therefore, have worn the diamonds when she left the schooner.

"You don't believe me?" cried Carona, suddenly, sharply, as she saw the expression on Addison's face.

"I am asked to credit a good deal."

"Some enemy has done this."

"How? When?"

"In this shanty!"

Addison shook his head. Determined to do justice to the girl he had informed himself on every minute particular until he was as well qualified to discuss the matter as though he had been with the girl ever since Sky-Rocket Rob pulled her from the water.

"Impossible!" he answered.

"Mr. Addison, do you condemn me?" the girl asked, her eyes full of tears.

"Would to heaven I need not!—but listen to what I have to tell!"

He then went over the whole ground and showed how impossible it was that any substitution could have been made, but Carona was not convinced.

"It was done here," she asserted, "for when the last call came for us to go on deck, and I was prepared for it, I distinctly noticed the necklace which I wore, and I knew it was my own. That is settled—the change was made on shore!"

If she was innocent it was unfortunate that she made the last statement and accompanying assertion, for Rob knew positively that such a change had not been made since she came ashore.

"Miss Dane," answered the old gentleman, in a voice far from steady, "I am filled with deep regret, but I cannot believe you!"

The look which then appeared in Carona's eyes haunted Rob for many a day to come.

"And you—you think me a thief?" she gasped.

"I will not say that. Heaven must be your judge; I will not. Child, child, I have thought well of you, upheld you, been your defender, felt attracted to you, loved you as one of my years may—and can I condemn you now? I dare not answer one way or the other, for my head is pulling against my heart; but one thing I find it hard to credit—that that necklace got upon your neck unknown to you. It was stolen from me just before we went on deck; I can't believe but you know how it got into your possession!"

Sky-Rocket Rob stepped quickly forward.

"Miss Dane," he announced, "you ain't deserted, yet. I still think you innocent, and I'll stand by you!"

CHAPTER VIII.

AN EVENTFUL CHANGE.

ROB was nothing if not loyal, and, unlike Horace Addison, he was young. Consequently, he was more ready to believe than the old gentleman. His heart was not more kindly, however, and Addison met the last utterance with the earnest response:

"No one here is going to deal severely with Miss Dane. I am attracted to her in spite of myself, and she is safe from annoyance."

"But I'm going to prove her innocence!" Rob asserted.

"How?"

"I don't know yet."

"You shall have all the aid I can give."

"I thank you most gratefully," Carona answered, addressing Rob, "but I am not sure that I deserve all this. Misfortune dogs my steps constantly, and I may as well yield first as last."

"Don't you do it!" stoutly returned the Life-Saver. "I'm going to be your champion, and there may be such a thing as getting at the bottom of all these mysteries."

"What will your friends say?"

"Why should they say anything?"

"Remember that I am charged with being a thief!"

"All the more reason why honest folks should stand up for you. You ain't guilty and I know it; and what's more, I'm going to prove that you ain't!"

"Have you a plan in mind to accomplish that result?" inquired Addison.

"Not yet."

"I will furnish aid, financial and otherwise, if it can be done."

"But you think me guilty," interrupted Carona.

"I don't know what to think. If I were twenty years younger I should, I suppose, consider the evidence against you conclusive; but advancing years have put a spirit of charity within me that does not always yield to mere evidence. Besides, I have from the first—if you will pardon an old man for saying so—been drawn toward you by a singular sympathy and interest. I wish you well. My position is not logical, and is hard to understand—but, I hope all will end well."

Rob Wiley found it less difficult to understand than the old gentleman thought; he comprehended that, while Addison's strong intelligence and worldly wisdom compelled him to see the strength of the evidence against Carona, his rare kindness led him to hope against hope that she might not be guilty.

The Life-Saver was not similarly situated. He was young and impulsive, rather than logical; he had taken a strong liking to Carona; and he was firm in the faith that she was innocent.

Her own face was a picture then. Deepest sorrow was thereon expressed, and she seemed ready to sink under the load. It was no consolation to her that Addison wished to think well of her: it only showed her more clearly how desperate her position was.

If one as noble as he thought ill of her, how would it be with the general public?

The return of Roger Walden and Mrs. Vincent-Brown interrupted the conversation, and other matters came under consideration.

The Giant's Boot, well fitted as it was for Foretop Ben and his fellow-fishermen to live upon, was not the proper place for the shipwrecked persons. Ben's shanty was the only dwelling on the little point of land, and its accommodations were limited.

On the other hand, the neighboring town afforded ample accommodations, and to that place the castaways must go. This was a very simple matter for Addison and Carter, but Carona's friends—and this meant Addison, Rob and Roger—were not wholly at ease in regard to her.

She was either an accomplished evil-doer or a child of misfortune. If she was the first, she ought to be avoided; if the second, no effort in her behalf could be too earnest. If the one, she was not a fit subject to go into a private family; if the other, she was not suited for life at the hotel, among the rattle-headed summer boarders.

Rob Wiley grappled with the subject bravely, as was his custom. He had relatives in the village who, he thought, would be just the ones to receive her, an aged man and his wife, the last of whom was his father's aunt. At his father's own home there was a tribe of growing children who might not always be thoughtful of Carona's feelings.

When this plan was explained to Walden he gave it his support at once.

He was anxious to help the storm waif away from Mrs. Vincent-Brown, and it could be done in that way.

Little more time was lost. The fishermen launched the boat with which they had crossed from the mainland the night before, and all of the party except Foretop Ben and two companions entered and were rowed across the strait.

Once more on land, the town was not far

away. It was a place of considerable size and some pretensions to style. Although many of its male inhabitants were fishermen, that was not by any means the sole industry.

All of the pursuits flourished which are usually to be found in a town of corresponding size, and the hotel did a good business in catering to summer boarders from the cities.

To this hotel Mrs. Vincent-Brown went without delay, her manner showing that she was deeply offended with Walden. She had sought his society a good deal ever since she came down from New York like a female Napoleon, to conquer as she marched, but the night on the Giant's Boot had aroused her ire.

That it would be permanent was not to be believed. She belonged to a class of women who forgive a man easily—a sister woman, never.

Wesley Carter escorted her to the hotel. Both ignored Carona. They knew that Addison again had his diamonds, and appearances indicated that the girl was not to be prosecuted. More than that, he seemed to have joined Walden in acting as her protector.

"The more fool, he!" declared Carter.

"The old chap is in his dotage," pronounced Mrs. Vincent-Brown.

"No doubt."

"Do you believe she has lost her past life?"

Carter shrugged his shoulders.

"Do I believe the moon is made of green cheese?" he retorted.

"No doubt, she is a professional thief."

"Looks that way."

"I suspected it from the first."

"You are a lady of good judgment."

"When I see another woman," declared Mrs. Vincent-Brown, "I can read her at a glance. Call it intuition or what you will, I can see through her with singular skill. I never make a mistake!"

The faintest possible smile on Carter's face showed that he regarded this conceited claim as absurd, but he was the speaker's ally for the time being, and he answered dutifully:

"You have proved your skill in this case."

"I only hope she won't steal this town bodily."

"She may not find the officers of law, here, so soft-headed and mush-hearted as old Ad and this Walden clown."

"I only wish I had charge here!"

Miserable Mrs. Vincent-Brown, holding her head high in the air, and claiming to be a model of her sex, was working herself into quite a fever over Carona's case, and at each turn she fancied that she had more and more cause for it. Really, as it was not her place to condemn Carona, anyway, she was only harrowing up her own mind with the poisonous fangs of groundless resentment.

Horace Addison, too, went to the hotel soon after, limping painfully, and leaning on an improvised staff.

Roger and Rob took Carona to the selected refuge. Mr. and Mrs. Bond were quiet, simple-minded people, and though Roger, from a sense of duty, told all that he knew concerning the storm-waif, they did not fail to see the matter as he did.

They readily agreed to receive Carona, and harbor her until she decided what to do.

Just then she was in a state of great uncertainty. The conviction that she ought to be in New York City, which had caused her to leave Norfolk, was no longer strong. On the other hand, she declared that she ought to remain where she was until events proved her innocence.

"And," Rob said to Roger, as they left the house, "I'm going to be the instrument of proving it!"

Walden answered encouragingly, for he was all in sympathy with the boy Life-Saver, but, really, he could not see how the result was to be accomplished.

CHAPTER IX.

TONY BRISTLES'S MISFORTUNES.

"WHAT'S that fellow skulking around there for?"

"Wants ter git in out o' the fog, I reckon."

"Poor place to do it."

"Good place; hard ter git in."

"He's an evil-looking knave."

"Rags an' dirt is only skin-deep."

"I believe the man is a burglar."

It was late in the evening of the day after the wreck. Sky-Rocket Rob stood near Otis Bond's house in company with Tony Bristles, who has been mentioned as a partner of Foretop Ben. Tony—his real name was Anthony Britton—was

a young man of such varied qualities that nobody had ever yet been able to decide whether he was wise or foolish.

He had been left an orphan at the age of eight years, and had seen hard experience until old Ben took him in charge. Under that tutor he had risen above his old level, and what sagacity he possessed was not a little due to the ex-sailor.

Rob Wiley had decided to sleep in his great-uncle's house for a while. Tony was over on an errand for Ben. The two had met by chance, and, standing near Bond's house, under the cover of a tree, had seen something which impressed Rob as suspicious.

That evening a fog had settled over the coast and the town, which shut out almost everything else, and made pedestrians almost liable to run into each other.

Despite this state of affairs, Rob had noticed a ragged, disreputable fellow approach the house and take a deliberate, careful survey of the premises. He had a vague recollection of having seen the fellow before, but could not say positively.

The stranger looked as critically as though he thought of making a purchase, but did not go near enough to make himself liable to direct charge.

"Ef he's a burglar," responded Tony, "he's had poor luck in the past. He's a man of rags, verily."

"He may have diamonds in his pocket."

"A diamond on the buzzom is wuth ten in the pocket!" proclaimed Mr. Bristles, gravely.

"He's going away."

"See the dirt on his face wrinkle as he walks!"

Tony's eyes must have been sharp if he saw what he asserted, but the speaker gave Rob no chance to investigate. His legs were long, and his steady retreat caused him to be enveloped in the fog soon after.

"Only a tramp, I guess," Rob commented.

"A tramp's heel makes mile-posts on many a road," quoth Tony Bristles.

Rob did not pursue the subject. His eccentric companion was not a person to consider a matter seriously or intelligently, so it would be a waste of time to linger under the tree with the fog settling all around and adding new gloom to the scene every moment.

They separated. Tony started back to the Giant's Boot; Rob went into the house.

Carona had already retired. She was in a condition far from that of good health, and rest was something very necessary. Her recent illness, the unpleasant affair aboard the Singing Sally, and the wreck—all had combined to upset her nerves.

Rob forgot the ragged man for awhile, and talked with Bond and his wife on trivial matters, but, when he had retired to his chamber, the scene he had just witnessed returned to his mind.

Who and what had the stranger been?

The Life-Saver had fears that Carona might be menaced, but he could not see why she should be. That there were persons who thought ill of her was not to be denied, but why should they molest her?

"I reckon I'm nervous," Rob finally decided, smiling. "My imagination is too keen; I'll go to bed and to sleep."

This wise resolution he adhered to so closely that, in half an hour, he lost all consciousness in slumber.

In the meanwhile the fog and the darkness wrapped the town in close embrace. Few persons were astir. Over on the beach quietude was beginning to rule again. The ocean seemed to repent of its fury, and the rollers that broke on the shore lacked the impetus, and the crash previously seen and heard.

From the Giant's Boot a boat crossed to the mainland. Its occupant was Tony Bristles.

There was a period of inactivity at the Giant's Boot as far as fishing went. Foretop Ben did not intend to do anything at it until the matter of the wreck was settled, and it was thought that work could be begun on the Singing Sally by the next day.

Tony was of a different mind. He wanted to resume fishing, and though Ben pointed out that the fish would not bite well until the effects of the storm passed, and the water rid itself of mud, Tony was not convinced.

He was obstinate, and, after a long talk with Ben, he had crossed to the mainland, bound to make certain preparations and be out at day-break.

Having crossed the neck of the water, he secured his boat and went to the town.

His way was past Bond's house, and when he reached it he saw a light on the back piazza. Some one was there whom he took to be Rob,

and he hastened to join him and ask for his company on the fishing-trip.

When he reached the piazza he found that the door of the kitchen was open, and that some one stood just outside with a lantern in his hand.

"Hullo!" greeted Tony.

The unknown turned quickly, and Tony saw that it was neither Rob nor Otis Bond. There was a brief silence, and then the stranger made reply:

"Hullo!"

"What're you doin' here?" Tony asked, suspiciously.

"Lookin' at you."

"You don't live here."

"Don't I?"

"No. I've seen you afore."

"Hev you?"

"Yes. Seen you prowlin' around some hours ago. You're a burglar! I'm a detective; I arrest ye hereby an' herewith."

The stranger, who was the ragged man of the early evening, held up his lantern until its light fell full upon the fisherman's face.

"Tony Bristles, you're drunk!" he declared.

"I be?"

"So I said."

"I ain't so drunk but I kin arrest you, an' I'll do it!" asserted valiant Tony.

"No, you won't. Why? Here's the reason!"

The stranger's hand had been under his coat. It now came out quickly, and Tony suddenly found the muzzle of a revolver only an inch distant from his nose.

"Surrender, or I'll blow your head off!" growled the tramp, in a deep base.

"Ho-ho-hold on!" stammered Mr. Bristles. "For the Lord's sake, don't do it!"

His desire to make an arrest went out like a feeble candle-flame. Courage was not an ingredient of his nature, and he wished himself safely back at the Giant's Boot.

"I think I shall have ter kill you," the ragged man continued. "That's the only way ter make sure that you will keep mum."

"Don't, don't! I'll do anything; I'll be yer slave. Don't kill me!"

"Will you swear ter hold yer tongue forever?"

"Oh! Lord, yes!"

"Then perhaps I'll spare ye. I'll see. Well, come with me!"

An imperative motion of his hand caused Tony to enter the kitchen, and then the stranger shut the door.

"Now, we're goin' up-stairs. You'll keep along with me. You'll step like a cat, an' do all you kin ter avoid bein' heard. Ef you don't, I'll blow yer head off. See?"

"Yes," groaned Tony.

"Come on!"

The simple-minded fisherman dared not resist or object. His philosophical element, which usually flamed up occasionally, was now dead and turned to ashes. He was frightened clear through, and perfectly obedient to the tramp's wishes.

They ascended the stairs. It was like a death-march to Tony Bristles. He knew that not only was Sky-Rocket Rob on the alert, but that he had secured a revolver. If he should awake and use that weapon, he, Tony, might speak only from the cemetery after that terrible night. His knees wobbled painfully as he went up, and he knew just how a condemned man would feel upon the gallows.

The house had been built for honest people, and there were no locks upon the doors. The tramp paused before one of these, and deftly fitted a cover over his light which transformed it into a rude dark-lantern. Then he motioned to Tony to follow, and entered the room.

Poor Tony was a monument of perspiration, and trembling with fear, but he dared not disobey. He entered. The room was a bed-chamber; its occupant was Carona Dane.

Tony gazed at her in a species of fascination.

Would she awake and recognize him?

This she did not do at once, and, after a terrible pause, his gaze wandered to the tramp. The latter, keeping a wary eye upon the sleeper, had advanced to the table and set down his lantern. Then he knelt on the floor, and, removing several things from his pocket, one after another, thrust them under the edge of the carpet, where it met the wall.

Large grew Tony's eyes when he saw that at least one whole handful of this stuff was green-backed bills—paper money.

Strange possession for a tramp to have! Stranger yet for him thus to part with!

When he had concealed under the carpet all that he wished, he arose, held out his revolver,

tapped an unwashed finger upon the barrel, and motioned Tony to precede him in retreat.

They left the room.

CHAPTER X.

ROB RECEIVES STARTLING NEWS.

THE following week brought no important change in the situation. The entrance of the tramp to Otis Bond's house had not been discovered, for he left no visible traces behind, and Tony Bristles, the only person who could, and would, tell of it, kept silent through mistaken motives.

The tramp had sworn to kill him if he revealed anything, and, besides, Tony had a vague idea that he would be liable to arrest for entering Bond's house.

That a confession would be the shortest step to safety never occurred to him.

Carona was still at Bond's. Acting upon the plan already outlined, Roger and Mr. Addison had written such an account of her case as they thought proper, and had sent it to New York for publication in a leading daily, hoping it would meet the eyes of her friends.

This step they had tried to keep secret.

Addison had remained at the hotel a while, but had finally taken a trip to New York himself. Carter continued at the place, and was often in Mrs. Vincent-Brown's company.

He had made the statement that he had a full million invested in real estate at the metropolis, and the ambitious woman was not disposed to let such a fish escape the hook.

Her husband, a well-meaning, hard-working man, had made what little money he possessed—some five thousand dollars—by running a cheap restaurant. No one with a critical taste could make a good meal there, but many who were not critical came, and he thrived in a small way.

Originally as poor as she could be and live in freedom from want, Mrs. Brown used her husband's few dollars for sails and was ever on the alert for a cruise. She aspired to be thought rich and "toney," and worshipped those who really came under that head. Amos Brown and the restaurant were rarely referred to by her. From Mrs. Hannah Brown she emerged into new radiance, signed herself Sybil Vincent-Brown, and admired herself greatly.

She had a use for Wesley Carter. If he was worth a million he must know other millionaires, and have entrance to fashionable society. As his friend *she* might force the doors of that glorious circle.

Happy thought! Sybil Vincent-Brown was in rapture, and she did all she could to impress Carter favorably.

The wreck had been looked to, and such articles removed as were worth taking, but the bulk lay on the rocks, nearly high and dry at low tide, and never since the storm with her deck under water.

Sky-Rocket had carried out his intention of acting as detective, but even an older head than his might have been discouraged with such a lack of evidence.

Thus far he had made no discoveries.

On the seventh day after Carona came to Bond's house Rob and Bristles had been out fishing together. As they were aware, Roger and old Ben had the same day gone twenty miles down the coast on business.

The Life-Saver and his companion landed at the town, disposed of their fish at the hotel, and then started for home. Their way was past Bond's house, and Rob decided to stop there.

Leaving Tony outside, he opened the door and entered. Mrs. Bond greeted him with a smile.

"You ought to have come sooner, Rob!"

"Why?"

"Carona is gone!"

"Gone?"

"Yes."

"You don't mean it?"

"Oh! but I do; her friends came for her, and she went away with them."

"When? Where?" demanded Rob, in great excitement.

"Only a short time ago—in fact, I wonder you didn't see them, for their boat could hardly be out of sight."

"I saw a sail-boat going up the shore."

"It was theirs."

"And Carona has really gone?"

"Yes. Her friends came for her, and as they were in a hurry, she went right off. She wanted to wait until you and Roger came, but they had to make haste to carry out their plans; so she left her love, and said she would see you again."

Placid old Mrs. Bond talked quietly, but Rob was far from being in like mood. From the first he had been startled, and the progress of

the statement had filled him with additional alarm.

"Did she recognize those friends?" he asked.

"No; her memory would not come back."

"Do you mean that she went away with entire strangers?"

"They were like strangers to her."

"By heavens! I believe she has been trapped!"

"Trapped!" echoed Mrs. Bond, opening her innocent eyes widely.

"Yes. If the game had been a square one they would never have rushed her away so suddenly."

"But who should trap her?"

Sure enough, who? Such enemies as Carter and Mrs. Vincent-Brown could have no motive that Rob could see. But his active mind, once at work, did not fail to find another explanation. Was not the newspaper account they had caused to be published just as likely to meet the gaze of foes as friends?

Perhaps all her troubles were due to old, bitter enemies who now had made another attempt and kidnapped her.

He questioned Mrs. Bond further. The alleged friends, both of whom were men, had come down the north shore in a sail-boat and, arriving at the house, had assumed to be very glad to see Carona. Neither claimed to be a relative, and had not attempted a greeting warmer than hand-shaking; but they had seemed devoted to her, had talked about her mother and sister, and their anxiety, and said that these relatives had begged Carona to hasten to them.

The girl had tried desperately to remember the persons referred to, but all in vain.

Their requests, however, backed up with a show of haste, and the need of prompt departure, had not been in vain. Carona had gone with them. Gone where? To a town well north, Mrs. Bond explained. There, according to the messengers' story, the mother and sister were waiting, but on the eve of returning to their home in New York.

It was certain that the messengers must have been plausible men, for they had deceived Carona and Mrs. Bond, but Rob found food for suspicion in just the fact that would have occurred to Mrs. Bond readily if she had been younger.

If Carona's mother and sister were at the town to the north, they would have hastened to come in person for their afflicted relative. What if they were about to return to New York? Would that fact keep a mother away from her child?

Rob was positive that the girl had been abducted, but his courage rose to meet the emergency. She must be rescued. By whom? Roger and Ben were away, and not likely to return for hours, while every moment was precious.

His resolution was quickly taken.

Without any unnecessary words he informed Mrs. Bond that he believed Carona had been decoyed away, and that he was going in pursuit of her. The old lady was amazed and confused.

"It don't seem possible."

"I'll test it—if I can catch them. Now, then, aunt, will you see Roger as soon as he comes back, and tell him all about it?"

"Dear me, yes; but—"

"That's all. Tell him I've gone in pursuit!"

With these words the Life-Saver hastened out of the house. If he had been allowed ample time for thought he might have associated with himself a more capable person than Tony Bristles, but the impulsive decision of the moment was that all depended upon him and his eccentric companion. He seized Tony by the arm.

"Come!" he directed.

"Eh? What's the rush?"

"Follow, and I'll explain when we're in the boat."

"Be we goin' a-fishin' ag'in?"

Rob did not answer but, hurrying Mr. Bristles along, soon reached their boat. They entered, and, in a very short time, were receding from the shore.

The first boat was no longer in sight, but he was not without hope. Their own little craft was the swiftest that the town could boast, and the wind was exactly in their favor. Of course the last advantage would also favor the kidnapers, but, unless they had a boat far beyond the average, he expected to gain every moment when once under way.

There was a miniature harbor outside the town, but this was soon passed and they had the full benefit of the wind. The boat answered bravely to the demand, and they went skimming along merrily.

Rob used his eyes to the utmost, but the fact was undeniable that the runaways were out of sight. This was liable to be the case

any way, for the shore was very irregular, and the Life-Saver buoyed up his spirits with the hope that the intervening distance could be cut down rapidly.

Tony noticed his companion's excitement, but did not give it any great amount of thought until they began to pass the Giant's Boot.

"Ain't you goin' ter land?" he then asked.

"No."

"Be you goin' a-fishin'?"

"Fishing! We're going man-hunting!"

Tony opened his eyes more widely than ever.

"You ain't goin' ter turn pirate, be you?"

"We're going to hunt pirates!"

"Great land o' Gilead! you don't say so! Robert, I'm with ye! Ef thar's any one thing I feel cut out for, it's pirate-huntin'. Whoop! Let 'er go, Gallagher!"

The eccentric young man swung his hat wildly, and looked fully as much delighted as his words would indicate, but Rob's set face never relaxed.

CHAPTER XI.

HUNTING HUMAN GAME.

THE sail-boat would have delighted any veteran of the sea. She cut the water as neatly as a knife, sending it rippling away on either side with a murmur that was full of music. Sky-Rocket Rob had been accustomed to boating from his infancy, almost, and he handled the racer with the skill which come of long practice.

Tony Bristles was in high spirits. He exulted over their rapid progress, and at the idea of hunting "pirates." Just what he understood by that, or what he expected, was not clear.

Rob was depressed. It was highly encouraging to sweep along the shore so nobly, but until he sighted the other boat he would not dare to hope. Feeling sure that Carona had been abducted, he looked forward to a long race, at the best. Even if the other party was sighted, the affair was liable to end with a fight.

"Why didn't we think to take revolvers?" he suddenly asked, mechanically giving his thoughts aloud.

Tony hesitated, and then produced a bright new revolver of the most approved pattern.

"Where did you get that?" Rob asked, in surprise.

"Bought it."

"When?"

Tony looked confused, and then stammered:

"L—lately."

"Well, I never dreamed that you went 'heel-ed,' but that weapon may come handy before we see the town again. It's a good thing to have."

"Thought so, when I bought it."

"What use had you for it?"

Tony's face flushed, and he did not meet his young friend's gaze.

"I didn't know what might happen."

Rob detected the evasion, and wondered what it meant, but far more important matters were on his mind, and he forgot the circumstance for the time.

Minutes passed and grew into hours, but the long-looked-for sail of the fugitive boat did not appear. The case became serious. Night was near at hand, and, if she could not be overtaken before that period, all hope appeared to be gone.

They had reached a broken part of the coast. Several islands, which, by some persons, might be termed detached fragments of swamp, lay in a group. The land was generally very low, and, often, impassable. To avoid this broken coast entirely one must take a wide detour to the east, as Rob well knew, while a straight course would have strong advantages.

One thing he realized—for some time to come, as had been the case for some time past, he would have only a limited view in front, and might get almost up with the fugitives without discovering the fact.

The direct course was taken boldly.

Previous knowledge of the place enabled him to choose the broadest channel, where their boat would receive the most aid from the wind; but even that precaution did not save them from a vexatious let-up in speed.

This was not due to any fault of the channel.

Some time before a black cloud had appeared in the north. It rose steadily, and with an appearance of conscious power, yet it came up against the wind, as it blew where the boat was racing along. For some time the south wind had been growing fickle and weaker, and it finally began to die out entirely.

Meanwhile the cloud in the north grew, seized upon more and more of the heavens, and assumed a threatening aspect. Plainly the north wind was to be the victor.

"We're goin' ter hev a howler!" declared Tony.

"Yes."

"But it won't last long—unless it changes into a storm."

"It makes the future a problem. Once in open water again, we shall find the waves rough and annoying, and the wind will be dead against us. Progress in that case will be dangerous, I should say. Now, the question is: What effect will it have on our fugitives?"

Tony did an unusual amount of thinking, for him.

"How's the shore above?"

"Barren and desolate. The nearest town is so far that, if they try to make it, they are likely to get caught in the darkness."

"And it'll be darker than black cats. And the water will be rough as 'tarnation. And I don't b'lieve they'll be fools enough ter try an' make the town, with a gale likely ter be howlin' around them any minute. You an' me hev seen jest sech squalls come up afore now, an' we know they kin pounce down as sudden as a panther, an' a heap more dangerous."

All this was in keeping with Rob's own opinion. For several minutes the idea had been growing upon him that the abductors would make a landing rather than face the dangers of a squall.

But if they did land, where would it be? Nowhere in that vicinity could they find shelter, unless it was in some shanty unknown to him. That such existed was probable, but the coast was so wild, low and barren for several miles that nothing was certain.

Darkness came on rapidly, and far ahead of time. Rob began to feel that theirs was a lost cause. When their eyes failed to be of any use, what hope would remain of overtaking Carona and her companions?

He held to their course. A little while longer would bring them to open water, but it was already nearly dark.

"Hullo!" quoth Tony, suddenly, "I kin see the sun settin' over yender."

Rob looked, but one glance was enough to show him that Tony did not see the sun. Its rays could not have struggled through the black cloud, anyhow, and the particular sight that Bristles saw was the light of a fire.

It proceeded from a ridge to the left, but whether that of island or mainland the Life-Saver did not know, though it had immediate and strong interest for him.

Had the abductors encamped there?

For awhile he was undecided what to do. The delay necessary to make an investigation might prove fatal, but, when he looked ahead, he could not but see that it was next to hopeless to proceed in that direction, let the other craft be what it might.

He briefly explained his views to Tony, and that person fell in line at once. The fire was then clearly to be recognized as such, and he declared that it must be the abductors' camp.

A landing was made without delay, and their boat secured.

Before them was a slight bluff, heavily wooded. On the summit burned the fire.

Rob was about to suggest a search to see if the other craft could be found when Tony uttered a cry. He had used his eyes well, and when Rob looked for the result, he found a boat not twenty feet from their own, but nearly concealed by bushes which overhung it.

An examination was made, but it established nothing. It was a sail-boat, but there was no way of determining whether Carona had ever been in it.

"We'll go up the bank," Rob announced.

"S'pose they fire?"

"We must be careful."

"Right! There are men in these regions who would shoot us as quick as though we was buzzards. Look out!—it hurts like sin ter be filled up with lead."

"You may stay here, Tony. I'm smaller than you, and somebody must crawl up toward the fire on the sly."

"You do it; I'm a fisherman, not a trailer."

"Stay by the boat, and see that nobody gets away with it."

"Correct."

Rob started on his trip. It was not easy to ascend the bank without making any betraying sound, but due care enabled him to accomplish it in a fairly successful way. Once up, he was able to get more information as to the fire.

Only a few yards away was a long, low shanty. If the whole had once been roofed over it was so no longer. One-half still had the old walls, but the top was gone, and through the opening mounted the red flames of a fire made of material that burned fiercely.

The interior of the place was not open to the life-saver's view, and no one was visible outside. He waited for some time, in hopes that chance would reveal more, but there was no change. Then he dropped upon his hands and knees and crept cautiously forward, pushing the bushes out of his way with great care.

Reaching the wall, he found that it was thicker than was to be expected. No crevice was to be seen, and he could gain no view. He drew his knife and began to cut an opening. This was not difficult; the wood was somewhat rotten, and a crevice was soon made.

The desired chance was gained.

He looked inside.

First of all he saw two men. One was moving about and, as it proved, was preparing an apology for supper. The other sat on a block of wood, evidently buried in thought.

No woman was visible.

The men were of the ordinary kind. Rob was prepared to see persons well dressed, but of sinister cast of countenance. These men answered to the first requirement, but not to the second. No stretch of fancy could make them look like ruffians. Neither were they especially prepossessing. In every way they were ordinary men.

He who was silent had an angry look. Something had gone amiss with him. He suddenly raised his head, looked across the shanty—almost at Rob, the latter thought—and impatiently exclaimed:

"Well, perhaps you'll suggest something?"

"I will. Let us make an effort to find some inhabited house."

The Life-Saver started. It was the voice of Carona Dane, and it sounded from a point not three feet from him.

"But consider the darkness, the swamp and the lonesome coast," urged the first speaker.

"There must be a house somewhere!"

"It may be twenty-five miles away, and the storm will soon break."

"I care not for that," Carona replied. "I can endure the journey; I only ask that you will let me go. I am afraid of this wretched place!"

CHAPTER XII.

URGENT NEED OF HELP.

THE Life-Saver was drinking in every word, and his mind was as busy as his ears. From what he had heard, and the manner of the speakers, he believed that if the men were villains, which he did not doubt now, they had not yet revealed their character fully to Carona.

The spokesman's voice and way were alike persuasive, while she spoke with uneasiness and fear of something alarming to come, rather than with a clear perception or known peril.

"I wish your mother had come along," the spokesman gently observed.

Rob heard a sigh.

"Would to Heaven she had!" Carona replied.

"Yet," he added, "her poor health would ill fit her for such hardship."

"Somehow, I cannot realize it."

"Realize what?"

"That she was my mother."

"Indeed! but I have seen you grow up in her house, you know."

"Strange that I don't remember you."

"Ah! but your mind is not yet strong."

"If memory ever returns it must be because some object, or incident, of my old life is brought before me so powerfully and vividly that the whole comes back with a rush. I feel that!"

"Possibly it will be so when you see her."

"Perhaps so," Carona doubtfully replied.

"Don't get downhearted, Miss Dane; all will yet be well."

"Anyhow, I want to leave here as soon as we have eaten supper."

A look of annoyance appeared on the man's face.

"Are you willing to pass through the swamps, with mud and water at times waist-deep, perhaps, and risk a journey of twenty or thirty miles?"

"Yes," was the prompt answer.

"Then I must say that you are very foolish. The squall which is coming up will be a brief disturbance, and, by morning, the ocean will have become still enough to enable us to make a safe, quick and comfortable run up the coast, and finish our journey."

"I am not content to wait until morning, and must ask you to carry out the idea I have advanced. Let the journey be as long and difficult as it may, I want to make an effort to find some house at once."

"Strikes me you are confounded obstinate!" cried the stranger, roughly.

"What would you expect?" Carona asked,

tremulously. "This wild, deserted, gloomy knoll and camp fills me with fear. You surmise that, in the past, it was the temporary residence of a party of fishermen, or somebody of the kind, you say. It may be safe enough, but I can't convince myself of it."

"We are certainly able to protect you from any outside danger, for we are well armed and should shoot any one who might approach the camp; so it must be that you lack faith in Alberts and me."

"Remember, Mr. Call, that you and your friend are strangers to me. True, you say that you have known me ever since we were children, but, as I cannot remember that fact, or you, I am compelled to take the word of one just the same as a stranger."

"Considering all we have done for you, I think you are ungrateful!" declared Call.

The man was very transparent to Sky-Rocket Rob, and the latter clearly saw that Carona had many doubts and fears. Her voice was eloquent with these emotions, and he did not hesitate to believe that she bitterly repented having come with the men.

A sail up the coast by daylight was very different from a night on the ridge in the deserted shanty.

It was a place to try stronger nerves than Carona ever had. The fire was the only cheerful thing in the situation. The shanty was miserable; the trees and bushes were dark and gloomy; a storm was impending; she had doubtful company, and there could be no privacy for her at the camp.

Rob suspected that if she dared to express her opinion of the men it would be more emphatically unfavorable than had yet appeared. As for him, he knew that they were rascals, and that Carona was the victim of a nefarious plot.

Naturally, as she was not sure of her position, and was so alarmed over the situation, Call's last complaint added to her distress. She hastened to make peace, and displayed not a little skill, while not trespassing upon veracity by asserting a confidence in them which she did not feel; and a degree of harmony was restored.

She, however, insisted upon leaving the island, as, judging by the man's words, the land really was, while he heard her in such a mood that Rob suspected the mask would be thrown off soon.

The Life-Saver turned and made his way back to Tony Bristles.

It was evident to even an unpracticed eye that the squall was inevitable. Black, detached clouds rushed along the gloomy expanse above as though in haste to reach some given point, and it would not have surprised Rob to see the outbreak come at any moment.

Tony Bristles was calmly enjoying a chew of tobacco when found.

"Was it a hotel?" he asked, innocently.

"It was the abductors, with Carona in charge, camped in an old shanty."

"Did you ask them for her?"

"Hardly! They are armed, and I heard them say they would shoot any one who approached."

"The dickens! Say, let's go back!"

"I thought you were eager to fight pirates?"

"I be—at long range. Besides, pirates are gentlemen. I don't believe these fellows be."

"Tony, be sensible. Carona must be rescued."

"That's so."

"Have you any plan?"

"No. Hev you?"

Tony's indifference was very amazing. Weak-minded as the young man was, Rob did not forget that he was ten years older than himself. In this emergency he felt the need of an old head to manage affairs. But Tony appeared to be absolutely of no value.

"We can't fight them openly," he pursued.

"I had rather not," agreed Tony.

"On the other hand, they will not be likely to leave the camp—the squall will probably overcome Carona's desire to leave—and as they have no reason to suppose they will be attacked, we may be able to foil them after they get asleep."

"Haden't we better go back for help?"

"No, no; we must depend wholly on ourselves. Now that we have sighted them we must keep them under watch until we can rescue Carona. Tony, you must get some pluck into you. You have a revolver; what are you afraid of?"

"It's their revolvers I'm tremulous on!"

"But you'll help me?"

"Yes; ef it's safe."

Rob was angry. Always erratic, Tony was now in a mood that promised but little for the future. His early enthusiasm and courage were alike gone, and he manifested both indifference and cowardice.

Paying no further attention to his ally, the Life-Saver sat down to try and form some plan. It was not yet settled whether the final scenes would be in the shanty, but he did not believe that the men would allow Carona to go away.

Unless they had decided previously to stop at the shanty, how happened it that they had food along?

"They had planned to stop here; they will stop, in spite of Carona's requests, and we can only wait until one or both get asleep. Then we must fight them!"

Such was his decision, and, by the time it was made, there was something else to occupy his attention. The wind had begun to blow again, and its suspended fury suddenly found vent; it pounced down upon the knoll with a sheet of rain borne along with it. The trees bent and writhed, some branches fell, and the noise was great. Then the darkness was banished temporarily by a flash of vivid lightning, and the thunder that followed was short and sharp, like the sound of a mammoth whip-lash cracked by giant hands.

It was not a pleasant storm to face, and Rob and Tony looked for better quarters.

Boldness seemed safe, then, and they actually went again to the shanty and crouched by its walls, while Rob used his old means of observation.

Call and Alberts were eating supper, and Carona was trying to do the same, but her efforts amounted to but little. She was so worried, and so suspicious of her companions, that appetite would not answer her summons.

The leading abductor had recovered his usual equanimity, and his conversation was pleasant and respectful.

Whatever the plot was, Carona did not seem to be in immediate danger.

Supper over, Call and Alberts produced cigars and began to smoke. Even Carona did not speak of departure in the furious storm then raging.

One thing she did observe with uneasiness. As before stated, the fire, while inside the shanty walls, was at a point where no roof was over it, and the heavy fall of rain was already putting it out. Lower and lower sunk the once big blaze, and dark shadows began to creep into the long shanty.

Ultimately, unless a change was made, total darkness would prevail there.

She was about to mention the matter, when she had a fresh shock. The big trees had been kept in constant convulsions ever since the vanguard of the storm struck, and to one the ordeal had been too great.

There was a new, sudden sound, and a many-limbed giant of the knoll swept through the air in resistless downfall.

No one there saw it come, but they were not left ignorant. It struck the shanty, crushing a part of it almost into a shapeless mass.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE LIFE-SAVER'S PUZZLING SITUATION.

THE last event was so abrupt and radical that Carona uttered a cry of alarm, and Call and Alberts sprung to their feet in a mood scarcely calmer. None of the three had been injured, and that part of the long shanty beaten down was not near enough to deprive them of shelter, but they looked at the tree in uneasiness while the storm roared outside as loud as ever.

"Touch and go, by Jove!" Call exclaimed.

"A little more this way, and it would have been more 'touch' and less 'go,'" Alberts added.

"True. If it had taken the shanty in the middle it would have crushed it like an egg-shell."

"I reckon we wa'n't born to go under that way."

"I don't know. If one tree has yielded to the wind, others may follow suit. Stay here, Al, and I'll go out and sum up the chances."

He went at once. The trees were still writhing in the grasp of the wind, and some were swaying toward the shanty in a way far from pleasant to see, but the discovery that there had been a slight imperfection in the fallen giant, where it was twisted from the trunk, gave him ground to hope that the others would outlive the storm.

He started back and paused for a moment to look at the cause of their late alarm. While he was gazing at the big trunk and huge branches, the latter of which held the former

clear of the ground, and had been the means of saving the shanty, something caused him to start back.

A groan sounded close at hand! "Zounds! what was that?" he muttered. "Could it have been the wind?"

It was repeated, and this time he knew it was not a voice of the storm. Unquestionably, it came from under the tree, and he advanced nearer in a state of perplexity.

Then the lightning flashed, and he distinctly saw a human form among the broken branches, crushed, he thought, by the fallen giant.

He forgot the consequences of interference in the natural desire to investigate the matter. In a moment he was down upon his knees. Reaching in between two branches he first removed some of the broken limbs, which were of kindling-wood fineness, and then grasped the supposed fatally-injured person.

Considerably to his surprise it did not prove that the unknown was held fast, and he had no trouble in pulling him out.

"It must be some one who was trying to get out of the storm," he soliloquized. "Well, some life seems left, and I'll give the fellow a lift. He's only a boy, anyhow."

The last meditation was the result of the thought. Would it not be dangerous to befriend any one at such a critical time?

"There can't be any harm in such a youngster," he added; and then he picked the "youngster" up bodily and carried him into the shanty.

Their appearance created a sensation. "Hallo! what in blazes have you got there?" Alberts demanded.

"A kid who was beaten down and left senseless by the fall of the tree."

"Who is he?"

"Don't know."

"What was he doing here?"

"Seeking shelter, I suppose."

"Why did you bring him in?"

Alberts's voice and manner betrayed more than his words, and Call gave him a warning glance.

"He was alone, and, of course, it's our duty to take care of such an unfortunate, even though he be a mere fisher-lad."

Both men looked at Carona. If they had done this at first they would have been better rewarded. First sight of the boy had caused her to start violently, for she had recognized Sky-Rocket Rob. She was now looking at him in wonder and perplexity. How had he come there?

This was a conundrum she could not answer.

There was now nothing in her gaze, fixed and startled as it was, to arouse suspicion in the kidnappers' minds; it was natural that she should be shocked and frightened at seeing a boy so near death as this particular youth appears to be.

But Rob Wiley was not in any such deplorable condition. He was unconscious, but not even a bruise marked his skin. If ill luck had directed the broken tree toward the quarter where he had crouched under the wall, Providence had saved him from serious injury.

He had received a stunning blow, but the larger branches, broken though they had been, formed a support that held the trunk of the tree clear of the ground, saving his life by a narrow chance.

Already he was recovering, and, seeing this, Call produced a whisky-bottle and gave him a dose. A few moments later the Life-Saver opened his eyes.

For a moment he was bewildered, but recollection quickly returned, and he realized his exact situation.

"So you're alive?" greeted Call, cheerfully.

"I really believe I am," Rob admitted, with a faint smile.

"Much as ever. The tree knocked you out in one round."

"What were you doing there?" demanded Alberts, suspiciously.

Rob did some rapid thinking. He did not believe he had been recognized by the men, and if Carona had been shrewd enough to keep silent up to that time, she would not be foolish enough to betray his identity now.

"I was on my way here to get out of the rain and wind," he clearly returned. "I was out in my boat with another boy, fishing, and the storm made it out of the question to go home. We landed and started here, but the tree fell. After that I don't know what happened."

"Where do you belong?"

Rob named a town twenty miles up the coast.

"So you're a fisherman?"

"Yes, sir."

"Is this your regular ground?"

"We have to fish wherever we can get bites. It's a hard life, and not much pay for work. If I had the money I'd run my own boat regular to New York, and hire a man to fish for me, but these things take capital. New York's a long ways off."

He shook his head, and assumed such an unsophisticated air generally that Call set him down for a very innocent, harmless youth, whose whole soul was bound up in fish. Alberts was more suspicious.

"What's become of the other boy?" he asked. This was a question which had been troubling Rob.

"Sure enough," he returned with a start. "I hope he hasn't been hurt by the tree. He was close beside me."

"There's a lantern here; we'll look." They took the lantern and went out, but Tony Bristles was not to be found. When certain that he was not under the tree, Rob breathed freer; Tony had escaped the danger, but had run away.

The Life-Saver was glad to know that his companion was safe, but matters were left in a state of uncertainty. Rob himself had been placed in the enemy's own camp by chance. He did not intend to lose the advantage if he could help it. As long as he was near Carona, and could maintain his character of an ignorant boy of the coast, he could watch over her. Perhaps, too, chance would offer opportunity for him to rescue her. To do this, he desired Tony's aid, but Tony was absent, and it was very uncertain what that erratic person would do.

His already developed timidity might cause him to keep so far away as to be useless, or he might develop courage as unsystematic as it would be rash, and ruin all by some ill-advised break.

When they returned to the interior of the shanty, Rob managed to signal to Carona secretly, which he did by placing a finger over his lips and giving her a warning look.

That told her that she was not to let the men know she recognized the Life-Saver, and the latter felt sure that she would not jeopardize the cause.

Call next gave his attention to making a smaller fire just under cover of the roof, to replace the fast-fading blaze before relied upon.

That was nearly drowned out.

The storm continued, and the four occupants of the place sat down and tried to pass the time the best they could. Rob avoided glancing at Carona, and even Alberts began to lose his suspicions.

The boy champion was formally installed as one of the company for the time being, but he did not intend to remain idle. Carona must be rescued.

CHAPTER XIV.

A WILD MAN ON THE RAMPAGE.

THERE was a change for the better outside. Both wind and rain lost their force, and it was evident that the worst of the squall was over. The sky did not clear at all, however; the clouds hung low, and it looked as if the ebullition of nature would end in a drizzling rain.

The quartette in the shanty were making themselves as comfortable as possible.

One of the features of the boat in which Call and Alberts had taken Carona away was a suspiciously large stock of blankets. These now became very useful. Three were put at her disposal, and each of the men had one.

All things pointed to a night in the shanty. Certainly, the freshly-upset ocean would not be a safe place for a sail-boat before morning, and, now that Sky-Rocket Rob was on the scene, even Carona did not speak of a journey through the wet swamp.

Nature appeared to have aided the kidnappers in their very transparent designs, but the presence of Rob made a vast change in the scene, as viewed by Carona.

She longed to question the brave lad, who had saved her life once before; to ask what the prospects of rescue now were; but she realized that secrecy must be maintained, and did nothing rash.

The Life-Saver was, outwardly, the calmest person present. He warmed his feet and dried his clothes by the fire, keeping up such a conversation as an ignorant fisher-lad might under like circumstances. Call had plausibly explained the presence of his own party, and Rob was careful not to ask unwelcome questions.

Thus even Alberts came to regard him as harmless.

Rob, however, was in a fever of suspense. Nobody knew better than he that Tony Bristles

was as unreliable as an April day. If the simple-minded young man was near he was liable to walk into the shanty at any moment, and betray everything by an unguarded speech.

The Life-Saver's hope was that both Call and Alberts would go to sleep. Unless they did, his chances were not of the best. They were armed; he was not.

After a while he began to yawn, and finally spread one of the blankets close to the fire and lay down. His position, while careless and easy to look at, was such that he could watch every one else in the shanty.

He expected to do a good deal of watching that night.

Yet his eyes soon closed, and he, to all appearances, sunk into peaceful slumber. Call noted all this attentively. He waited half an hour, and then turned to Carona.

"Haven't you better retire, Miss Dane?" he asked.

"Whither am I to retire?"

"We have but one room, it is true, but the stout cord which, as you may see, is stretched from pin to pin across yonder corner, not only suggests its former use, but gives us an idea. By hanging a blanket upon the cord your room is made."

"I shall not sleep to-night."

"You will be perfectly safe. I shall watch until morning dawns."

"I am too miserable to sleep."

"Believe me, nobody regrets this delay more than I."

"Will you take me back, to-morrow?"

"And disappoint your mother?"

"I do not care to go to a mother who would not come to me."

"Remember that she is ill."

"Is she?"

"Did I not say so?"

"You said so!"

"You still doubt us?"

"I do."

Carona had not intended to be so frank, for she knew the suspicions of the men ought not to be kept active, but her indignation had overmastered her.

"Really, I suppose it is not strange," returned Call, amiably. "I don't blame you a particle. All I do ask is that you will suspend judgment until we have given you proof, one way or the other."

"When will that be?"

"Early to-morrow forenoon; as soon as the ocean gets over its riot so our boat can run comfortably."

"You say that my mother will be there to meet us?"

"Yes."

"Strange that I cannot remember her!"

Call looked toward Sky-Rocket Rob, but that youth seemed to be sleeping peacefully.

"This is but a small part of what you have forgotten, since your past is all gone. But let us defer consideration of this until we see your mother. Will you act upon my suggestion, and let me curtain off the corner?"

"Yes."

Call looked encouraged. Carona was yielding a trifle, and, as he could not understand how the presence of Rob influenced her, his hopes rose. The corner was soon arranged, and the girl retired from general view, arranged the material at her disposal so that she could partly sit and partly recline, and prepared to exercise what patience she could.

Her abductors went near the door and talked in voices so low that even Rob could not catch a word.

Then Alberts lay down, but Call put his back against the wall, lighted a cigar, and settled down to keep watch.

Obviously, the Life-Saver must use patience in order to accomplish his purpose. Unarmed as he was, he could not act while Call remained awake.

An hour elapsed.

The wind appeared to have died down almost wholly, and the rainfall was not heavy enough to make an audible sound. Only for Call it would have seemed that everybody and everything was willing to be quiet.

In spite of himself Rob was beginning to feel sleepy when something occurred to arouse him thoroughly. His secret gaze had strayed to the doorway—there was no door—when he was startled to see a human head appear there.

It came into sight slowly and cautiously, and was followed by a pair of shoulders. Its owner reconnoitered silently and carefully.

It was Tony Bristles.

Rob was alarmed. What idea was in Tony's mind was not to be surmised, but if it was

coherent, the fact was strange. His chances of unintentionally doing a good deal of damage were abundant, and the Life-Saver could not make a single gesture to warn him back.

Call's back was toward him, but Call's face was toward Rob, and if the latter made a motion, the watcher for the abductors must see it.

There was nothing to be done except to let Tony operate as he would.

The simple-minded fisherman's face bore a cunning expression, and there was faint hope that he realized the critical state of affairs, and would govern himself according. He was anxious to learn all about the shanty and its occupants, but the light was not strong, and no one but Call was plainly visible. Gradually a puzzled look overspread his face, and his ally became nervous.

But the worst was yet to come.

Once more Tony advanced; he passed the door; he entered the shanty.

Rob was too much alarmed to form any plan. He could only watch in a species of fascination.

Tony moved with singular caution and good luck, so that his advance was almost noiseless, and Call was singularly oblivious to what was going on. This could not last forever, though. Tony was creeping straight toward where Alberts lay wrapped in his blanket, and this brought him into the middle of the room.

Call saw him at last, and the discovery was both surprising and startling to him. He gazed in inactivity for a while; then he leaped to his feet and found his voice.

"Who in perdition are you?" he cried.

Tony leaped up, himself, and a look of complete terror overspread his face. He had not seen that member of the party before, and he fell into a panic in the presence of discovery. His lips unclosed and he suddenly emitted a yell which would have done credit to a madman.

Another moment and the revolver which he carried flashed in the fire-light. He turned it swiftly upon Call and fired. There was neither aim nor system about it, and probably as little thought, but he kept blazing away until six shots had been fired as fast as he could deliver them, while his almost unearthly yells made a strange and alarming accompaniment.

Of course the whole party was astir. Rob and Alberts had leaped to their feet, but while the latter was frightened almost out of his senses, the Life-Saver was calmer than was to be expected.

He had called to Tony to stop firing, but his voice was lost in the uproar. Then he thought of Carona, and started toward her, but he collided with Alberts with such force that both fell.

Rob struggled up and started again. This time he was more successful: he reached the blanket and brushed it aside. Disappointment awaited him.

Carona was gone!

He was surprised, but it dawned upon him that she had fled during the disturbance, and he quickly emerged from cover. He was just in time to see the skirts of Alberts's coat vanish through the door, while a glance showed him that the departure left him sole occupant of the shanty.

Every one else had fled.

Greatly alarmed for Carona, he was not slow to follow a distance in their steps, but, when he reached the outer air, not a person was to be seen.

Night and the bushes had swallowed them up.

CHAPTER XV.

ROB STRUGGLES TO WIN.

ALMOST total silence reigned around the shanty, and Rob was unable to locate even one of the runaways. It seemed almost impossible that they could get out of hearing so quickly, and, already bewildered, he stood in a state of uncertainty for several moments.

Then he made a vain circuit of the shanty. This, however, brought him back to the door, and, looking in, he saw, not one of the party, but a revolver.

He hastened to secure it. It proved not to be Tony's, but a fine, fully-loaded weapon, which he welcomed gladly.

As Call was not to be seen, it followed that, whether wounded or not, he had escaped death in spite of all of Tony's headlong shooting.

It would not do to delay there, so the Life-Saver hastened down the bluff. Both boats were where they had been left, and were vacant. Plainly, all of the missing persons had taken to the woods in precipitate flight, and it was hard to say who had been the most frightened of the quartette. If the situation had been less serious for Carona, the thought would have excited Rob's laughter.

As it was, he was terribly alarmed for her. Which way was he to go to seek her?

After a while his wits returned fully, and he procured the lantern and searched for the trail. In this attempt he was successful at once. It was not hard to find the sharp-pointed heel-marks which, well imprinted in the soft earth, betrayed the passage of a lady's feet, and, once started, he followed rapidly.

Carona's course had been toward the northwest, and there was every evidence that she had gone in great haste. He dared not lose sight of the tracks, so, as a consequence, he could not equal that speed, but he did his best.

It was a rough way the unfortunate girl had taken. Trees and underbrush abounded, and the swamp had been made almost impassable by recent rains. A traveler sunk in mud and water at almost every step.

Rob went on with the lantern held forward and the revolver ready for use. In a short time the trail began to curve around toward the west, but so gradually that it became clear she was unconsciously following the arc of a circle.

Where her wild wanderings would end he did not know, but the gravest fears seemed called for as the swamp became worse and worse. Mud, water, bushes and logs alike barred the way. Whether he was gaining Rob could not tell, but he did have evidence that Carona's strength was giving out, and that she was moving but slowly.

At last he made a discovery. He was following the trail as before when he came up to a large log, and, as he was about to cross it, he raised the lantern and the light fell full upon a man who was sitting upon the fallen tree.

It was Call.

"Hullo!" spoke the latter, faintly.

"You, here?" cried Rob.

"Part of me."

"What are you doing?"

"Resting."

"Resting!"

"That's what I said. When a man has two bullets in his carcass, he needs to take things easy."

"Are you wounded?"

"Rather! That maniac who descended on us got in his work, and it's a wonder I'm alive. I ran into this diabolical swamp, and only stopped when I got so weak that I fell down—more fool, I! Now, I'm trying to get out of this fix, but it's slow work."

Rob was thinking more of the girl than of the wounded abductor, and he looked down at the trail.

"Where is Carona?" he asked.

"Just what I'd like to know!" groaned Call.

"Don't you know?"

"I don't."

All this was quite possible. The Life-Saver saw that she could easily have passed before Call reached the point.

"Will you give me your arm and help me out?" the speaker added.

"I will, on one condition."

"Name it!"

"Why did you abduct Carona?"

Call's eyes opened widely.

"What's that?" he cried.

"You decoyed her away from friends by lies. You know you never intended to take her to her mother, but acted as her foe. Why did you do it?"

"See here!" cried the wounded man, in a rage, "Alberts was right; you're an infernal spy!"

"I'm here to rescue Carona, I admit."

"By the fiends! I'll—"

Call rose to his feet and lifted the club he had been using as a staff, but Rob unceremoniously turned the revolver upon him.

"Drop it!" he called out, sharply. "I hold the trump here, and you can't scare me. Keep off, or I'll add to the damage already done you!"

The kidnapper was in a passion.

"Oh! if I had my revolver!" he cried. "I'd fix you; I'd do you up—"

"Ifs don't count, and I can't stop to waste words on you. So long!"

The Life-Saver leaped over the log and resumed his way. The man called something after him, but it passed unheeded. Once more the brave youth was on the trail with the patience of an Indian. He had lost all knowledge of the points of compass, but he had a vague idea that, already, he had nearly completed a circle, and that his face must be toward the ocean.

For five minutes longer he pursued his way, and then the swamps ended at a knoll. He ascended the side, and, at the top, saw a low

structure faintly lighted by a fire; but not so faintly but that he recognized it.

After all the tramp, he was back at the shanty.

Despite his suspicion that they had gone in a circle he was surprised at this discovery, but Carona's trail led straight on, and he hurried to the shanty.

He reached the door. The place was no longer untenanted; Carona crouched by the fire, warming her hands by the blaze. She sprang to her feet, and then terror gave place to joy.

"Oh! Rob, Rob!" she cried, "I am so glad to see you. Thank Heaven you are here!"

He shook her hand warmly.

"Jiminy! but you can't be gladder than I am!" he declared. "It's been a hard pull, but I hope we are all right now."

"Where have you been?"

"Following your trail."

"And I—oh! Rob, I wandered on, and on, in that fearful swamp, only to learn in the end, when it seemed that I'd gone many miles toward safety, that evil fate had led me to go in a circle. I came back to this horrible place."

"Never mind; it's a good place to start for home from."

"Can we go now?" she asked, eagerly.

"I hate to trust a boat to the ocean right after such a squall."

"But the men—where are they?"

"Gone into the swamp, too."

"Aren't they liable to come back?"

"Yes," Rob admitted, reluctantly.

"I care not how roughly the water may roll; I had rather take my chances there than to remain and meet those men. Who are they? What are they?"

Her agitation and fear influenced Rob not a little, and he began to think well of the idea of leaving. It did not seem that he could oppose Alberts and Call alone, while as for the ocean, he had been accustomed to that all his life.

It would be a most dangerous undertaking to sail down the coast, unless the water was quieter than he had reason to expect, but he was in just the mood for trying it.

He explained how he regarded Call and Alberts, and Carona agreed with all he said. She had lost all faith in them.

"Can't we start for your home at once?" she asked, when he had finished.

"Dare you risk it?"

"I am eager to risk it."

"Then we'll go!"

That seemed to decide it, but Carona suddenly uttered a cry of alarm. Rob wheeled and saw Alberts standing at the door. The man smiled sarcastically.

"A very pretty plan!" he commented. "Only one thing is lacking to make it a success, and that is, ability to carry it out. When you sail, Miss Dane, you go north, not south. As for this hop-o'-my-thumb, I'll tie him up here by his heels!"

He advanced upon the Life-Saver, full of brute confidence that he could carry everything his own way, but Rob had no intention of being disposed of so summarily. Out came his revolver, and he was about to call a halt when affairs took still another turn.

Through the door sprang a figure covered with mud so as to be almost unrecognizable. He carried a club, and might have been a wild man of the woods. His eyes certainly were wild and staring, and the light of reason was not especially prominent in his face.

Yet, this man was Tony Bristles, and there was method in his movements.

He rushed toward Alberts, the club upraised to beat him down.

Some instinct, perhaps, told the kidnapper of his danger. He turned, saw Tony, sprang to one side, drew a bead upon him, and was about to fire when Rob, as alert as ever, leaped forward and knocked the revolver away.

Then the boy's own six-shooter was raised, while Tony lifted the club again. Both advanced, and, in the face of such danger, Alberts lost his nerve, turned, and then fled from the shanty.

"Now for the boat!" cried Rob. "Get away at once. We'll trust all to the ocean!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE LOST MONEY.

It was no time for coherent thought. Carona was pallid and nervous; Tony was excited and incapable of reason; and Rob was far from calm. Realizing that Alberts probably would return soon, and believing that such would be the case with Call also, he had only one strong

idea in mind—to get away before any such calamity could occur.

Piling several blankets into Tony's arms, he gave his own aid to Carona and hastened the retreat. No one barred their way, and, in a very short time they were by their boat.

It was not the easiest thing in the world to get it afloat on the open water, but, as no one appeared to oppose them, they were soon receding from shore.

Rob saw that the wind was still north, which would be very much in their favor, and, as soon as possible, this wind was utilized, and they were gliding through the channel.

There the water was rough, but the broken land was a shield in a measure. It was a gallant and not unpleasant voyage while these conditions lasted, but all changed when they reached the open water.

The ocean was rolling and foaming in an ugly way, and the night could not have been darker. Rain had almost ceased, but the blackest of clouds hung over them. Into this area of gloom and danger they must go, but Sky-Rocket Rob shut his teeth firmly and faced the danger. Tony was once more himself, and that meant that he was to be relied upon for good seamanship; Carona was comfortable as was possible, with the blankets around her; and the Life-Saver felt that he had rather face the perils of the ocean than the men who had made all this trouble.

There was joy in Otis Bond's house the next day. Just as the sun was rising Sky-Rocket Rob's boat came gallantly toward the shore, and, after that, it was not a long task to return Carona to her old quarters.

Roger Walden was not there to welcome her. He had returned from his trip too late to take part in direct pursuit of the abductors, not arriving until after dark; so he had taken a train for the North, hoping to head the enemy off in their flight.

During the day everything was very quiet. Rob saw Wesley Carter at the hotel, in conversation with Mrs. Vincent-Brown, and fancied that the man gave him a most unfriendly glance, but no words passed between them.

Rob was anxious to see Roger return. Plainly, Carona ought to be in a place safer than their town could ever be. The fact was settled that she had enemies, and it was not likely that their late defeat would end activity on their part. The unfortunate girl ought to be removed from their knowledge, and given a safe, pleasant home, where she could recuperate fully.

The Life-Saver knew of no such place, but he thought that Roger would be able to manage it.

Determined not to lose sight of her until Walden took charge, Rob remained at Bond's house. Tony Bristles went to rejoin Foretop Ben at the Giant's Boot.

Rob watched for Roger, and, as night drew near, felt that the young man must soon appear. Thus it was that the youth saw the first approach of a party which, though it did not contain Roger, was destined to act an important part in the near future.

It was composed of three persons. The most noticeable was Mrs. Vincent-Brown; the second was the hotel-keeper; the third was a local justice.

In this party Rob had but little interest, at first, and as he sat at the side window they passed out of his mind as soon as they did from his sight. He heard the door-bell ring, but gave that fact only casual attention until he heard footsteps in the hall and Mrs. Vincent-Brown's voice sounded.

Then, struck with sudden apprehension, he opened the door.

The trio were inside the house, having been admitted by Mrs. Bond. The latter's face bore a frightened look.

"The young lady is in her room," she was saying, "and I hate to disturb her."

"When the law demands we have to do many unpleasant things," the justice replied.

"But, surely, Carona can have done no harm."

"Is it nothing to steal my property?" demanded Mrs. Vincent-Brown, viciously.

Mrs. Bond turned pale.

"Surely, she has not done that!" gasped the good woman.

"Be at ease," interrupted the justice, kindly. "I, for one, make no charges while proof is lacking. Mrs. Vincent-Brown has lost money and jewels, and the fact that an envelope was found in her room, at the hotel, with Carona Dane's name upon it, compelled me to investigate a bit."

Sky-Rocket Rob pushed forward with eyes indignantly sparkling.

"It's a vile plot!" he cried.

"Perhaps you know who did it!" retorted the lady from New York.

"I don't believe you lost any money."

"Is this the voice of an accomplice?" demanded Mrs. Vincent-Brown, sourly.

"Be calm!" interrupted the justice, again.

"Our Rob is above suspicion."

"Nobody is—"

"You are right!"

The last retort was from the Life-Saver, and it clearly expressed his opinion of the woman, but the justice, who was a fair man, again interfered and calmed the hostile elements.

A robbery had been committed at the hotel. Mrs. Vincent-Brown had lost fifty dollars in cash, two bracelets, and a ring; none of the jewelry being extremely valuable. She had reported the loss to the landlord, and, by his advice, the matter had been kept secret, and a quiet search made, but on this day an envelope bearing Carona Dane's name and address had been found in the room from which the valuables were taken. Hence it was thought proper to search Carona's possessions, and the justice had decided that this should be done.

Rob did not waver in his opinion that all this was a plot, but he was of the opinion, furthermore, that the justice would be convinced of Carona's innocence most easily by allowing matters to take their course.

Accordingly, all went up to her room.

Carona had just risen, and she opened the door without delay. She looked in surprise at the large party, but the justice, confused and ashamed, made known their errand as quickly as possible.

The girl's face flushed. When aboard the Singing Sally she had been accused of theft, and it appeared that the game was not over.

"What new plot is this?"

She asked the question in a manner so impressive that the justice felt more ashamed than ever, and he hastened to reply:

"Believe me, if the charge is not true, you shall not suffer from it. You deny the charge?"

"I do, emphatically."

"And what she says you can depend upon," declared Rob, stoutly.

"Will some one remove that child?" demanded Mrs. Vincent-Brown, irritably.

"Rob has a perfect right here, and will remain if he wishes," the justice firmly asserted. "Miss Dane, excuse us, but we must make a search."

"Certainly. Do your duty, sir."

The search began. Mrs. Bond put her arm around Carona to assure the girl of her sympathy, while Rob's defiant, hostile air indicated that he was still her champion. Mrs. Vincent-Brown looked on with a sneering smile.

The two men did the searching. Carona's property was so limited that it was soon looked over. Nothing was found. Rob's face took on a triumphant look at what he regarded as a successful end of the matter, but the justice glanced at the carpet, and then began to search around its edges.

He soon reached a point where there was a suspicious bulging of the fabric.

He ran his hand under, fumbled for a moment, and then brought out—a roll of bank-notes!

Mrs. Vincent-Brown uttered a cry of triumph.

"It is mine!" she exclaimed.

"Wait! Have you the numbers of the bills lost?"

"No; but there were five ten-dollar bills."

"That is just what we have here!"

"Then I claim them."

"Be patient! Let me look further."

This he did. Next he brought out a card photograph, which, after a casual survey, he laid down. The next effort brought to light a pair of bracelets, with a ring tied to one of them.

"Mine!—mine!" almost screamed Mrs. Vincent-Brown, in great excitement.

"They certainly agree with the description you gave," the justice reluctantly admitted.

All eyes were turned upon Carona. Paler yet she had grown, but with her startled eyes turned upon the jewelry, she was silent.

Not so Rob Wiley.

"It's all a vile plot!" he reiterated, "and that woman and Wesley Carter are in it!"

He had not forgotten seeing Carter and Mrs. Vincent-Brown in conversation at the hotel, and now he had a presentiment that his accusation was true.

But a cool, airy voice sounded at the door:

"Who takes my name in vain?"

It was Wesley Carter himself, who had sauntered in accompanied by Otis Bond, a cigar rakishly thrust into his mouth.

"I take your name!" declared the Life-Saver, stoutly, "but not in vain. You have hatched this infamous conspiracy, as you hatched all the others!"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE PACE THAT KILLED.

CARTER coolly flipped the ashes from his cigar.

"I plead not guilty, though I don't know what the charge is," he answered, nonchalantly.

"Wait!" commanded the justice; "I want to talk here. Whose photograph is this?"

"I don't claim it," answered Mrs. Vincent-Brown.

The previous speaker held it toward Carona.

"Is it yours, Miss Dane?" he asked.

The light fell full upon the photograph and revealed the likeness of a fine-looking lady of about fifty years. Carona gazed at it, started, snatched the picture away, and then continued to look with a strange intentness. Large grew her eyes, her color came and went, and one hand was raised and pressed to her forehead. Her expression was bewildered, but it suddenly cleared, and the light of a revelation was in her face and eyes.

"My mother!" she gasped; and then she reeled and dropped fainting into a chair.

Utter silence prevailed for a time. It was broken by Wesley Carter's voice.

"A doctor seems to be needed here, and I'll go for him," he remarked.

It was, in some ways, a careless observation, but Rob Wiley, glancing up quickly, caught an uneasy expression upon his face. Even then the shrewd youth suspected the cause. Carona had recognized her mother's picture; might it not be that full recollection of her past life had returned, and that Carter dreaded the result?

The Life-Saver blocked his way.

"You can't leave until this is settled!" Rob declared, firmly.

"I can't! By heavens! stand out of the way or I'll twist your neck, you insolent cur! Out of the way! I come and go when I please, and it pleases me to go now."

"But you can't go!"

It was a stern voice behind Rob that spoke the words, and Roger Walden appeared with Horace Addison, Foretop Ben and Tony Bristles close behind him. Like Roger, Addison looked severe and menacing.

"Instead of going," added Roger, "you will yield yourself a prisoner, Carter!"

"A prisoner? Ridiculous! What charge have you against me?"

"Your ally, Benson, alias Call, has been accidentally chanced upon by us, and he has confessed that you have been systematically persecuting Miss Dane. Her real name he could not tell, but you know it. He, badly wounded and alarmed for his life, has confessed that he came here disguised as a tramp; that you stole certain articles from Mrs. Vincent-Brown, and hired him to hide them in this room. The articles were fifty dollars in money, two bracelets—"

"It is an infamous falsehood!" cried Carter, hotly, though Mrs. Vincent-Brown looked bewildered.

"We have proof. Tony Bristles, here, discovered the bogus tramp at his work, and forced to keep the fellow company at the revolver's muzzle, saw the articles hidden. Threats made at the time so alarmed Tony that he dared say nothing, but he has at last spoken out."

"Yes; an' I'm goin' ter swear to it, on it, upon it, an' at it!" declared Tony, proudly.

Carter's face was covered with perspiration which had started out freely. He saw that he was in a corner, but not being a man to yield tamely, he suddenly wheeled, ran to the open window and made a desperate leap for liberty.

Misfortune attended the effort. His toe caught on the lower part of the window, a heavy fall followed, and when the others looked out, they saw him lying in a heap.

Roger, Rob and Tony hastened down the stairs.

Horace Addison, kind and noble as ever, advanced to aid Mrs. Bond in resuscitating Carona, but was stopped on the way by the picture, which the justice chanced to lift.

"Bless me! what's this?" Addison cried, with a start.

"A likeness found in Miss Dane's possession."

"In her possession?"

"Yes; though she denied that it was hers. Still, she fainted as soon as she saw it."

"Great heavens! that picture is that of my deceased sister!"

"Is it possible? Why, Miss Dane fainted after gasping the words, 'My mother!'"

Addison looked dazed.

"This dumfounds me. Can it be—"

His hesitating, half-unconscious utterance was stopped by a movement on the girl's part. She opened her eyes and looked around with momentary wildness, which soon faded into intelligence and a near approach to calmness.

"My memory has returned!" she cried.

"Thank Heaven, Miss Dane!" answered Mrs. Bond, heartily.

"Dane? That is not my name. Why I ever assumed it I can't surmise. My real name is Estelle Roland."

"The daughter of Alfred and Lucy Roland?" demanded Addison.

"Yes."

Carona, as she may still be called, stopped short, started, and looked eagerly at the former speaker.

"Your name is Addison," she added. "My mother was named Lucy Addison before marriage—"

"And your grandparents?"

"Were Walter and Lucy Addison."

"Then, praise Heaven, you are my niece, recovered after many years!"

Impulsively the old gentleman clasped her in his arms, tremulously adding:

"No wonder I was strangely attracted to you from the first."

"But," she answered, "I do not understand. We thought you dead."

"I have always been a wanderer, and ten years in Africa as explorer and missionary caused me to lose all knowledge of you and my widowed sister. When I returned to Philadelphia I could get no trace of either of you, though it was said that your mother was dead."

"And but too truly. We removed to Baltimore, where she died."

"But your recent troubles—does the return of memory make all clear?"

"It does. I see now that one Darius Lowe—whom I now recognize as Wesley Carter—sought my hand in marriage. I refused him, and, when he became abusive, would have had him arrested for a forgery I knew he had committed; but he had me seized and shut up in a private mad-house."

"My sufferings there were great—let me not dwell upon them—but I finally escaped, going on foot and becoming ill with fever. It was during that illness that I lost my memory. Now you know all."

"I see how you have suffered, but I see brightness in the future. You are my niece, and I will protect you while I live!"

Rob Wiley entered.

"Wesley Carter is dying from his fall," the Life-Saver explained. "Will you see him?"

Carona shivered.

"No, no; don't ask it of me!" she exclaimed. "I see now how his enmity has followed me, haunting me even in my recent misfortunes."

"His own lips have confessed it. He admits that he stole the money from Mrs. Vincent-Brown. She was not in the plot, but he aimed to drag her in as an element of respectability to aid him. Next, he admits that he stole the money from the captain of the Singing Sally, and hid it in your state-room, with the same motive—to fasten the act on you, and make you miserable. Also, he stole the diamond necklace from Horace Addison's state-room. This he would have kept, it was so valuable, and did put on his own neck, enlarging it by adding a string; but when you were all kneeling on the deck of the Singing Sally, and death seemed certain, he, knowing the history of the necklace, was seized with fear for the future, and, going to you, clasped it around your neck. As the waves were rolling over you, his work passed unnoticed by even you."

"That explains it," Addison said, with a sigh of relief. "I'm glad we have the jewels. Originally given by my father to my mother, they were long in your own mother's possession, but were finally given by her to me. Now, I intend that they shall be yours."

"Carter also confesses that he hired Call and Alberts to decoy you away," added Rob.

"Both men are prisoners," observed Addison. "Call, badly wounded, was being taken North, in a boat, by Alberts, when Roger and I found them, knew them by a description given by a fisherman here, who chanced to see them, and had them arrested."

"Heaven only knows what would have happened to me only for brave Rob," gratefully exclaimed Carona.

"I know. Rob is a brave and noble boy, and I will not forget him in the future!"

Addison kept his promise.

When Carter's life had gone out like a candle; when Call and Alberts were in prison for their crimes; when Foretop Ben and Tony were again calmly fishing off the coast; when Mrs. Vincent-Brown had gone back to New York, crushed and humiliated, Addison rewarded all who had helped him.

Rob's reward was a good business position in Philadelphia, and Roger Walden's—well, the latter thought, when he finally married Carona, that she was his greatest reward.

Addison proved to be as noble a friend as any one could wish. His chosen associates were Roger and Rob, and he never has tired of helping them.

The old gentleman was sorry to see Mrs. Vincent-Brown go unpunished, but it was clear that she had been the victim of Carter's wiles and her own evil disposition. Such a woman is neither happy herself, nor will she allow others to be, but the world must have all kinds of people. For a while it must endure her.

Of all our chief characters only Foretop Ben and Tony remain on the coast. They occupy the shanty on the Giant's Boot, but never since that eventful night of the Singing Sally's doom have they had an experience of equal importance.

THE END.

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